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ABSTRACT

The research reported in this book was based on the belief that Australian schools should develop the speech communication as well as the reading and writing skills of their students. The book is designed to provide educators and researchers with guidelines for future work on oral language assessment and on curriculum development. The first section of the book provides a general discussion of oracy in theory and practice, specifically dealing with the nature and significance of oracy and the place of oracy in Australian schools. The second section reports the findings of a study that investigated what teachers were doing in the development of oracy abilities in their students. The third section discusses the oracy assessment program developed and carried out in Australian schools in 1978, including the program's test development and administration, the student samples, listening test and speaking test results, student performance on two specific speaking tasks, the performance of two different student groups, and the identification and assessment of listening tasks. (FL)

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# ORACY IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

S.F. Bourke
M.L. Clark
D.F. Davis
F. Holzer

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Australian Council for Educational Research
Hawthorn, Victoria.

1980

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Figure 11.12 THAID Analysis: All Background Variables as Predictors of Success on the Speaking Test Item (Making Critical Judgements) by 14-Year-Old Students 239

# INTRODUCTION

The studies reported in this volume originated in a proposal for research in oracy developed by a sub-committee of the National Committee on English Teaching (NCET), and accepted by the Committee at its meeting on January 30, 1976 as an area of high priority for research and curriculum development in the field of English teaching. Schools have an important task in developing the reading and writing skills of their students, but students also need to develop the skills of communicating their thoughts in speech and of understanding spoken communication. In view of the limited amount of information available about the development of the oracy skills of speaking and listening in Australian schools, it seemed important to make a study of what was actually being done in primary and secondary schools towards the development of these skills and to assess the level of student performance in the skills.

At the time that this proposal was being drafted, the ACER was undertaking a study of the reading, writing and numeration of Australian students at the request of the House of Representatives Committee on Specific Learning Difficulties; this study became known as the Australian Studies in School Performance. The possibility of including oral language skills in this study was considered, but the idea was not pursued because of the time constraints imposed upon the reading, writing and numeration project, and the additional difficulties which would have been involved in making assessments in speaking and listening.

A four-phase study was envisaged in the NCET proposal, as follows:

1 The identification of oracy skills, involving a survey of relevant literature, an examination of primary and secondary school syllabuses in Australia and elsewhere, and a survey of opinions of selected professional and lay groups;

2 a survey of oracy teaching in the upper years of the primary school and the lower years of the secondary school;

3 a survey of levels of performance in oracy among students aged 10 and 14;

4 the development of specifications for curriculum materials in the area of oracy.

The NCET proposal was forwarded to the Education Research and Development Committee (ERDC) with an indication of its support for the study as one of high priority for research in English teaching. In June 1976, the ERDC convened a meeting to discuss the oracy project, which included representatives of NCET and the Curriculum Development Centre, and subsequently accepted a recommendation from this meeting that a grant be made to Dr M.L. Clark and Dr D.F. Davis to commence the first stage of the study, involving a survey of the literature in the field and the collection and analysis of the various syllabuses of spoken communication in use in Australia and some overseas countries. This stage was completed in December 1976 when a report under the title of Oracy: Breakdown or Breakthrough? was submitted to ERDC. The substance of this report is included in the two chapters in Section A of this volume.

At a further meeting in December 1976, the ERDC requested the ACER to undertake during 1977 a study of the objectives and practices of oracy in schools and of the feasibility of assessing speaking and listening skills. At this time an Advisory Committee was set up to help guide the oracy study and the same Committee has continued on unchanged throughout. The names of the Committee members are listed below:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Professor D. Spearritt | - | University of Sydney (Chairman) |
| Dr M.L. Clark | - | Churchlands CAE |
| Dr D.F. Davis | - | Monash University |
| Dr J.P. Keeves | - | Director, ACER |
| Mr D. Novick | - | Education Department, South Australia |
| Mrs A. Wootten | - | Methodist Ladies College, Hawthorn. |

This study set up a framework for considering listening and speaking skills, sought information on school practices and needs in the area and obtained teacher opinion of the importance of a wide range of specific listening and speaking abilities. The results of the survey of teacher opinion and practice and the framework used in developing a model for the assessment of speaking and listening are described in Section B of this volume.

Following this feasibility study, a project on the assessment of oracy, including a survey of the performance of students aged 10 and 14, was prepared by the ACER. The ERDC and the ACER jointly agreed to fund this assessment program, which was commenced in 1978. The specific aims of this study were:

1 to design assessments in the areas of listening and speaking suitable for use with 10-year-old and 14-year-old students;

2 to estimate the proportions of Australian students who had achieved an adequate level of performance on the listening and speaking tasks identified as important; and

3 to identify some of the school, family and personal characteristics which were related to student performance in listening and speaking.

The listening and speaking tasks that had been identified as important for students were used to develop items that were written, field tested and refined in the first seven months of 1978. The items were then used to test national samples of 10-year-old and 14-year-old students in October 1978 on a wide range of listening and speaking tasks. The results of these tests were scored, checked, collated and analysed during 1979 and are reported in Section C of this volume.

As already stated, both the ERDC and the ACER contributed to the funding of the oracy study. A table showing costs in the major areas of expenditure for the project is shown in Appendix Ten. It will be noted that the total cost of the study amounted to $109,881 which was shared by the two organisations with the ERDC contributing $59,000 and the ACER supporting the study to the extent of $50,881. The cost of the assessment study per student tested amounted to $42.23.

Following the publication of this report, it is hoped that further debate will ensue concerning the types of assessments made and the student performances that were identified and reported. The debate should assist in bringing the development of oracy in schools into greater prominence when language curricula are planned and discussed. The discussion should also help to provide guidelines for any future work concerned with oral language assessment and curriculum development in oral language, an aspect of the oracy project which had been regarded as an important one in the original NCET proposal. Plans exist to provide a range of listening and speaking diagnostic tests to schools in order that they could undertake their own assessments and plan appropriate remedial measures. Although the oracy research project as such has now been completed, it is expected that it will provide a stimulus to further work in both curriculum development and assessment in oral language.

Thanks are due to the schools and to the individual teachers and students who so willingly gave their time to participation in the study at all stages. In times of increasing demands being made upon schools, their support for important research of this type is greatly appreciated.

The assistance of the Victorian Branch of the Education Section of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) was invaluable to the conduct of the study. Not only did the ABC give approval for material from their school program, 'The World We Live In' to be used for the Comprehending Passages Sub-tests, but they provided access to programs on tape, and production advice and expertise for the recording of the listening tests.

The ACER also wishes to place on record its appreciation of the services of the members of the Advisory Committee whose questioning, useful suggestions, contrary views and support have all been instrumental in strengthening the study.

D. Spearritt

SECTION A

# ORACY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

BY M. L. CLARK AND D. F. DAVIS

CHAPTER ONE

# THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ORACY

In this chapter an overview of the concept of oracy and its relationship to literacy is presented. It was produced at the end of 1976 and, together with the data on Australian Curricula presented in the next chapter, represents stage 1 of the ERDC funded study of oracy in Australian schools. The intention of the survey provided in these two chapters was to establish a context within which decisions affecting subsequent stages of the study could be made.

In recent years a major focus in language teaching has been concern for the development of personal and social adequacy and the integral dependence of this development on the articulacy of the individual.

> One of the major functions of speech is that by its means we declare ourselves as individuals and not until we have done that can we establish relationships between the members of a group... These relationships are established partly by non-verbal signals, but are largely dominated by and focussed upon verbal signals; and we must acknowledge the power of our speech to create, and particularly to destroy, relationships of trust and goodwill. (Britton, 1965:22)

This represents a change in direction, albeit as yet ill defined, from the earlier concern in education for proficiency in the skills of literacy - reading and writing. This concern has given rise to a new term 'oracy', advanced by Wilkinson (1965), to describe the general ability in the oral skills of both speaking and listening. This has come at a time when language specialists have found a need to evaluate current assumptions about the nature and functions of spoken language. In addition, there has been a growing realization that educationists have neglected 'auding' - the term coined by Caffrey (1955) to cover:

> the process of hearing, listening to, recognizing and interpreting or comprehending spoken language.

The relevance of the latter facet of 'oracy' for personal and social development has been well expressed by Barbara (1958).

> ... the better listeners we become, the more we will live in the present... And the more relaxed, spontaneous, alive, and productive we become, the more effectively we will be able to listen and the better able will we be to tap further our hidden resources of creative energies. We can then give of ourselves more freely in conversation, retreat less often behind empty word systems, and so develop a sense of mutual understanding and rapport. In order that this may become a reality, we must practice the art of listening.(Barbara, 1958:191)

Apart from the importance of the social-emotional axis of oracy, educational psychologists like Bruner (1966) have stressed a need for proficiency in oral language because they regard it as a vital 'tool for thought'. This is implicit in Barbara's definition of good listening but much more is being claimed by psychologists and language theorists - that, without a fluent and clearly structured oral language in the appropriate code (Bernstein, 1965) or field, mode or style of communication context (Halliday, 1965), children will find it extremely difficult to think abstractly and symbolically.

Whereas the committee responsible for the Bullock (1975) report is equivocal concerning current standards in the area of oral language, Wilkinson (1965) is categorical in his claim that 'the spoken language of England has been shamefully neglected'. Whatever the real facts are about relative standards of oracy, it is clear that there has been increasing concern about development of skills in this area at all levels of schooling. When considered against what is known about the development of language in young children this situation seems anomalous.

## Pre-school Language Development

For the normal child, speech develops first - usually within the aegis of the home - and written language, if it is learned at all, is acquired by means of the formal education process. The child hears language being used and he experiments with increasingly complex and novel patterns of language as he matures (Brown & Bellugi, 1964; McNeill, 1966). Ervin-Tripp (1971) quotes data which shows that not only do children acquire a fundamental set of linguistic rules and optional structures but they also develop sociolinguistic rules for the use of different forms in different situations.

To the average observer a young child seems to acquire language easily. This need to adapt to the environment is a strongly motivating force; his many demands which cannot be satisfied without recourse to assistance from adults or older children also provide constant models and practice in hearing and speaking a variety of language forms. The young child is normally unperturbed by error and gets constant reinforcement of appropriate language use. He has a high potential for discriminating a wide range of auditory stimuli and constantly practises the reproduction of these. Initially he has no well established schema for ordering language, nor has he developed logical sequencing or analytical thought processing. As a

consequence he is dependent on spontaneous intake and reproduction of language patterns. The latter are constantly changing in response to the tacit acceptance or rejection of his efforts by older siblings and the adults with whom he has need to interact.

We have ample documentation of the ways in which the infant first experiments with sounds by babbling and gradually evolves a linguistic system for the sounds of his native tongue which does not reach a fully developed status until about the age of 7 or 8. The child's responses clearly indicate that he understands words in familiar contexts before he reproduces them. Between 1 and 2 years of age he establishes a vocabulary largely of single words which have implicit grammatical relationships (Menyuk, 1969; Bloom, 1970). Between the ages of 2 and 5 years, in spite of an incomplete system of phonics and a limited vocabulary, the child learns the major proportion of the general rules of discourse. In parallel, and subsequently, he learns a variety of restrictions and irregularities in the language.

Indeed any explanation of mother-tongue learning must take into account strategies for operating at different levels of linguistic organization. This is undoubtedly enhanced by the common understanding which perceptive adult and child bring to conversations between them involving disparate levels of linguistic competence. Appropriate patterns emerge while conscious attention seems to be focussed on meaning. In other words listening skill is implicit in the acquisition of new language forms, and constant practice in the production of them is needed if the child is to develop skill in using them as working hypotheses for enlarging his language systems. Dialogue is essential to this development.

The initial interaction between the receptive mode of listening and the productive mode of speaking leads to the stage where, at the age of four, 'the child's phonological system closely approximates the model, and the remaining deviations are usually corrected by the time the child enters school' (Ervin & Miller, 1963:116). The major task of the initial years of formal schooling, then, is generally held to be the acquisition of the receptive mode of reading and the productive mode of writing (Johnson, 1968; Wilkinson, 1971).

The validity of the developmental progression from the receptive to the productive mode in both speech and writing described by Myklebust (1954; 1960) and others is substantiated by the work of those who

demonstrate that a disturbance at any point along the language continuum - listening, speaking, reading, writing - may lead to language disability, the most debilitating disorders being identified in those children who fail to comprehend auditory language (e.g. Johnson, 1968). This is further supported by the work of Vandenberg (1971) who attributes the impoverishment of the written language of deaf children to the fact that they have to be specifically taught both 'to understand speech and to speak' - an artificially acquired language system which is consequently inferior to that of a person with normal hearing.

## At School: Oracy and Literacy in Tandem

In theory then, the child comes to school with at least his oracy skills already developed to quite a considerable degree of sophistication. The majority of children are able to decode speech - to listen and to understand a fair proportion of what goes on around them - and they are also able to encode speech to the point where they can articulate most of their wants and make available to certain others some of their feelings and experiences. When the child begins the task of learning to read this new experience with the visual mode of language brings with it the need for a re-appraisal of his language forms. At this stage of development hopefully he comes to learn new strategies of handling language patterns as he develops his semantic repertoire. Perhaps he may now begin more clearly to exhibit need for particular corrective or remedial help in his semantic development if he has only a limited knowledge and use of syntactic structures.

Typically the school has taken the child's oral language competence fairly much for granted and has regarded it very much as a bridge to the initial acquisition of the literacy skills of reading and writing.

Although there is a greater emphasis on oral language in the infant school than at any other time of formal schooling, not all methods of teaching reading and writing take direct cognizance of the primacy of speech and of the oral language skills the child brings from the home to the school. Hence the concern has not always been so much to build upon the language skills children already possess as to initiate them into the language code of the school as quickly as possible.

The first century in Australian education has seen a system which, in every respect, reinforces the notion that written language is the only proper language of education - textbooks are written; chalk is used to

inscribe knowledge upon a blackboard - knowledge which students are often required to transcribe into their exercise books for future reading and reference; students are still required to write essays describing how they spent their last summer holidays, to discuss in writing the arguments for and against capital punishment, to practise writing formal letters of invitation to a party you are supposedly giving. They are given written examinations often to prove that they have acquired something which it is hoped they will ultimately use in the oral form - such as this question which was taken from an actual examination paper in a teacher-training institution in the state of Victoria:

> You have just finished reading "The Old Ships" with your Fourth year class. After the closing lines:
> "To see the mast burst open with a rose
> And the whole deck put on its leaves again"
> one pupil says, seriously, "But that's silly - I mean it couldn't REALLY. Could it?"
>
> Suggest a way of replying.

As Spearritt (1962) points out in this connection:

> Although reading and writing are the most recently developed of the communication skills in human societies, they seem to have been more readily accepted as legitimate subjects of school instruction than have the older skills of listening and speaking. (Spearritt, 1962:1)

There is almost no sense in which the support of Marshall McLuhan's thesis (1962), for example, has modified the traditional book enshrinement of high culture. In this regard one of the submissions to the Australian UNESCO Seminar on the Teaching of English (Davis and Hansen, 1972) pointed out that:

> Most teachers devote time within their English programmes to study of the mass media. The depth of the study varies... in some places it informs the whole of a syllabus, a syllabus that may be prefaced by some such aim as "To teach pupils to live with the media"; in other places it merely appears as a brief consideration of advertising techniques or television viewing habits... (Davis and Hansen, 1972:3)

In their current teaching practice, it seems that teachers of English still evince a good deal of faith in the offerings of the Gutenberg Galaxy.

Yet for those students who do not pursue a tertiary education - which also emphasizes written rather than oral skills - writing will be a little needed and little used means of communication. Once such students are liberated from what are often perceived as the irrelevant expectations of the teacher - even when these consist of a voguish invitation to 'do a

piece of creative writing', speech will regain its original supremacy as a communication mode. As Smith (1966) points out:

> Talking is not only the most natural form of communication with our fellows, it is often the only one which will ever be used by many children after they have left school. Most will write an occasional letter, few will ever attempt more in the way of written expression.(Smith, 1966:13)

Much of this is largely speculative and hence inevitably represents an oversimplification of the educational process - but it does point to the fact that teachers at all levels within the various institutions of learning tend still to behave as though mastery of the written word were the only acceptable, the only real, evidence of expressive skill:

> ... day in, day out, our schoolrooms re-echo to the constantly reiterated injunction, "Don't talk!" issued to secure a silence in which we may hear the scratching of laborious pens filling paper with the day's futile "English Exercise".(Smith, 1966:13)

In fact, very little explicit attention is paid to speech in the educational process, except in a small number of private schools where Speech, often termed Elocution, is an optional extra subject; even here, though, the emphasis tends to be on the proper and most advantageous use of the vocal chords rather than the content of what is being said. As Wilkinson (1971) has remarked - with trenchant emphasis in terms of the British context:

> ... the long tradition of authoritarian teaching in education has resulted in grave limitations on the oracy of students. (Wilkinson, 1971:96)

The situation with regard to listening is very much bleaker as listening skill, especially at the upper primary and secondary levels, tends to be taken almost entirely for granted. Spearritt's (1962) classical study of the listening comprehension skill of 300 Grade 6 primary school children is regarded as providing conclusive evidence of the existence of a listening ability (or abilities) related to but distinct from other verbal abilities. In fact one prominent writer in the field, D.H. Russell, cites these results as compelling evidence suggesting the necessity for constructive action:

> ... it is high time that more curriculum specialists and teachers of English made a serious beginning on the teaching of listening abilities.(Russell, 1964:264)

As a result of his work on listening in a sample of Victorian schools Fitzgerald (1970) argues that:

> Much learning occurs in a listening situation. There are listening skills. These skills can be improved through training. There is considerable research evidence to support each of these contentions. What remains is for classroom teachers and Standing Committees to accept them.(Fitzgerald, 1970:28)

Of the situation in Australia as a whole Clark (1970) wrote:

> Unfortunately, current curricula available in Australia offer little concrete help to the teacher in providing adequate training in listening. It is to be hoped that the upsurge in research on listening will lead to an early increase in useful information on this skill for the purpose of curriculum development.(Clark, 1970:2)

Of course, apart from problems of the lack of teacher preparation in the oracy area, there is a comparative lack of appropriate resources in the oracy area for use in the Australian context. Also there is a lack of appropriate assessment tools in the area although both Spearritt (1962) and Clark (1972, 1973) have attempted to define listening skills for assessment purposes. There are certainly published tests of listening comprehension but, apart from the ACER's NSW Basic Skills Listening Test L (1964), which is suitable only as a basal level test for use in Grades 3 to 6, there is no listening test suitably normed for presentation to a wide range of Australian subjects.

A similar model for testing is employed in the New Zealand Progressive Achievement Tests in Listening (1971) which also cover much the same grade levels, but extend into the lower secondary school level. Both the available American tests for use at the post primary level (STEP, 1957 Listening Levels 1, 2, and 3, and the Brown-Carlsen Listening Test, 1953) and the more recently published Wilkinson, Stratta and Dudley (1976) Schools Council Oracy Project Listening Comprehension Tests, both at the primary level (Battery A), junior secondary (Battery B) and senior secondary level (Battery C), present cultural difficulties for an Australian population. Moreover, it is arguable whether any of these, apart from those developed for the Schools Council, sample an appropriate range of listening tasks since they are essentially reading comprehension tests involving formal written expression modes presented orally. The Wilkinson et al tests are significantly closer to the mark in theory but the reality proves to translate from the theory less than satisfactorily at present.

In addition, there has been very little overt concern with the assessment of oral language products partly because so very few attempts have been made to assess oral language skills in any systematic global way, and partly

because of an inherent belief that such attempts are impossible anyway. Although oral examining has been prescriptive in foreign language courses in French, Italian, Indonesian, Russian and German, it has traditionally not been regarded as feasible to do so in English. As Skull and Wilkinson (1969) have pointed out:

> There is little experience at all in the evaluation of speaking and listening; and the standards by which they are to be judged cannot be those derived directly from reading and writing... The few oral composition scales that have been constructed come from the United States - Hosic (1925), Beverley (1925), Harring (1928) ... [but] their methods of obtaining data were unreliable and inaccurate... Betts (1931) ... showed that a longhand writer could record only 32 per cent of the total words spoken with 85 per cent accuracy, and that a stenographer could record only 59 per cent with 83 per cent accuracy. (Skull and Wilkinson, 1969:272)

The notion that this early work was to some extent vitiated by the lack of appropriate recording devices is especially noteworthy as it indicates that all the oral language samples were, as a consequence, truncated transcripts which had, perforce to be assessed essentially as Written English. More recent work such as that of Wilkinson (1965), Hitchman (1964; 1966a; 1966b) and Burniston (1968) has used tape recorders, but dissatisfaction has been expressed because even this record of the spoken word necessarily excludes many of the concomitants of spoken language - for example, facial expression and gesture. The classic case of trying to describe a spiral staircase without using any gestures or movements exemplifies this difficulty. Yet as Robinson (1972) points out in this connection, 'if roles can be exchanged satisfactorily on telephone links, visual cues are not a necessary condition [for achieving communication]' (Robinson, 1972:147).

Although it has now become recognized that it is at least as important to assess a student's oral production as it is to assess his written production (see the UNESCO publication The Teaching of English, 1973:67-156) there has been almost no attempt to devise means by which this might be put into practice in Australia. There has, however, been some experimentation with the examining of oral production in England, notably as a result of the efforts of Wilkinson (1965) and Hitchman (1966a).

Skull and Wilkinson (1969) have attempted the construction of what they termed an 'oral composition quality scale' for the 15-16+ age level. They appear to have used multiple general impression marking to select from 39 tape-recorded talks 10 talks which seemed to represent the widest

spread of ability and all the grades A to E. Ratings of these talks by two groups of markers using two different methods produce forty independent assessments for each talk. From the grand means of these assessments a rank order for the ten compositions was derived and this forms the oral composition quality scale.

Skull and Wilkinson conclude that:

> ... this scale could be used by teachers to estimate their pupils' oral composition of this particular kind. They could do this by comparing a pupil's oral production with the samples on the scale and then assigning the scale-value of the sample that most nearly equals their pupil's oral production.(Skull and Wilkinson, 1969:276)

Although the production of this scale gives rise to some interesting possibilities, it is our view that this kind of prediction about future uses of the scale would need to rest on greater numbers of subjects and a wider range of language samples.

It is clear from this brief review of the literature in the area of methods by which oracy skills may be assessed that there are significant gaps in our present knowledge. The paucity of work on the measurement of the quality of oral productions and the difficulties of sampling an adequate range of speaking and listening situations are but two of these.

## The Development of Oracy: K-12

As intimated in the previous section oracy and literacy operate in tandem in theory only. Literacy skills have traditionally held sway in schools and, in an educational and social climate where the efficacy of the teaching/learning in these areas is being questioned, this is still so today. The attempts of educational theorists to make explicit the links between language and experience, to stress the need to work with language, in use, and in context have served to broaden the scope of the reading and writing activities considered appropriate to the English classroom but they have scarcely yet had much impact on the areas of listening and speaking.

While there is explicit cognizance taken of the child's oral language development in the early years of the primary school, as has been indicated, this is largely as a means to the end of literacy. Children in schools are expected to listen to the teacher, to obey his/her instructions and, when confronted by conflicting listening options (e.g., the teacher and the child in the next desk) to make the educationally convergent but not necessarily most intriguing choice of the teacher.

Expectations regarding the speech of children in schools are much more limited. In most instances children may expect not to initiate communicative encounters. If they do so with their peers, many teachers will assume that they are not attending, that they are being irrelevant or potentially insurgent. If they do so with the teacher the chances are that this will be evidence of inattentive listening at some previous stage of the lesson.

Even when the communication is initiated by the teacher there is at least a fifty-fifty chance that he will already know the answer to the question that he is asking or, maybe, even be setting up the game which school children instinctively recognize as 'Guess what answer/word I have in my mind today'. Even if the question is seeking a genuine and not predetermined answer - and the questioner/teacher is prepared to accommodate to whatever answer is proffered there are two other factors which militate against the individual engaging in protracted speaking activity. One is the phenomenon which Mary Budd Rowe (1970) has termed 'wait time' or that small number of seconds which the teacher is prepared to wait for the individual to answer before he either leaps to question another child or rephrases the original question. The second is the teacher's recognition that the individual is but a small proportion of the total class and he must give others a chance to talk. Consequently teachers tend to permit the individual to utter only a couple of words, phrases or sentences (depending on that student's oral modus operandi) before their non-verbal behaviour signals to the student that it is time to give someone else in the class an opportunity to speak.

Such is the implicit oral structuring of Australian classrooms that there is very little opportunity for the development of oracy, particularly in years 3 or 4 to 12. We are in no position to chart the hierarchical development of oracy skills. In fact we know very little even about the relationship between oracy and literacy and probably less about the relationship between input and output in each mode.

Very few studies have been centrally concerned to examine speaking and listening skill within the same individual or group of individuals. Duker (1964) reports a number of unpublished dissertations (e.g. Harrison (1959); Evans (1960); Howe (1960)) which have looked at the relationship between speaking and listening but most published studies which comment on the relationship do so as a by-product of a study only peripherally related to this problem.

Wilkinson (1970) reports the findings of two studies which have looked at the relationship between listening and speaking, the results of which appear contradictory. The first is a study by Strickland (1962) of the language (with special relationship to reading) of American elementary school children. She concluded that:

> The structure of children's oral language as measured by the frequency of use of the common structural patterns was more closely related to listening comprehension than to any other variable.(Strickland, 1962:86)

The second study quoted by Wilkinson (1970), however, with a sample of 960 subjects, yielded a correlation of only 0.22 between the results on a listening test and Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) Spoken English Examination results. In this same study, moreover, teachers' estimates of the children's spoken ability correlated with the listening test results at only a slightly higher level (0.25) than with the external CSE Spoken English Examination (Atkinson and Wilkinson, undated).

Both Brilhart (1965) and Wilkinson (1970) refer briefly to an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Stark (1956) in which he found that 175 college students who were rated as good speakers performed better on the Brown-Carlsen Listening Comprehension Test than did those students who were rated as poor speakers. Brilhart (1965), however, criticizes Stark's study on the grounds that 'actual audiences' were not involved in the study and hence 'speaking and listening were not observed as the influence of speaker upon listener, and vice-versa' (Brilhart, 1965:36). This led her to postulate differences between speaking and listening in the sense that Stark has used the terms and what she referred to as 'communicative speaking and communicative listening'.

On this premise, then, Brilhart (1965) conducted a study with college students to determine the extent to which there is a relationship between the ability to obtain specific derived responses from others through speaking and the ability to respond accurately to the meanings of others through listening. Each subject acted as both speaker and listener. Acting as a speaker the subject's first task was to get the members of an audience to draw as accurately as possible a geometric figure which he described to them. Then, with another subject in the role of speaker, his second task was that of listener/drawer. This procedure thus yielded two scores for each subject. No evidence of a correlation between speaking and listening

skills was found. In addition speaking scores in this study did not correlate significantly with listening comprehension scores independently derived from the Brown-Carlsen Listening Comprehension Test (1953). Given, however, the Buros (1959) criticisms of the validity of the Brown-Carlsen test as a test of listening comprehension, and the fact that Brilhart's sample of her subjects' speech was limited in scope, the failure to find a positive correlation between speaking and listening skills may well be as much an artefact of the measures used as an indication that these skills are unrelated.

Brown and Carlsen (1953) have reported correlations of the order of 0.5 to 0.6 between their listening comprehension test and mechanical measures of written language (e.g. spelling, capitalization, punctuation), as well as correlations of the same order between their listening comprehension test and library skills such as the use of a dictionary. Such findings give rise to doubts about the conclusions which can legitimately be drawn from specific correlation coefficients where this test has been used as one of the variables. This further underlines our relative ignorance about this area. Wilkinson's (1970) comment that 'the relationship between listening and speaking is likely to be complex but has been little explored' well reflects the meagre state of our research knowledge (Wilkinson, 1970:142).

## Practices in Schools

The area of practices in schools was not able to be explored directly given the time scale of this initial (1976) phase of the study. However several indirect reflections of current practices were sought. The Resources Section of English in Australia (the Journal of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English) which began in 1971 and shares ideas for lessons submitted by teachers all over Australia was surveyed and a classification of the lesson aims attempted. The Conference of English Teaching Consultants of Australia (CETCA) Group, by virtue of its English Consultants constituency, was asked to comment on its view of practices in school. The data from the study by Duff and Clark (1976) and also that for a minor project by Hardcastle (1976) were relevant.

Table 1.1 provides an analysis of the Resources Section of English in Australia from 1971 to the present (i.e. 1976) based on an attempt to classify the stated aims of the lessons provided. As is evident from the table it was necessary to distinguish between single aim and multiple aim

Table 1.1 Classification of Aims of Resources from English in Australia, 1971-1976.

| | Primary | | Junior Secondary | | Secondary | | Upper Secondary | | Adult | | Various | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Single Aim | Multiple Aims | Single Aim | Multiple Aims | Single Aim | Multiple Aims | Single Aim | Multiple Aims | Single Aim | Multiple Aims | Single Aim | Multiple Aims |
| Assignments/Research | | | | | 2 | 2 | 1 | | | | | |
| Discussion (Class & Group) | 1 | 3 | 1 | | 6 | 18 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | |
| Oral & Written Expression | | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 5 | | | | | | |
| Specific Writing Practice | 3 | 2 | | 1 | 14 | 15 | 2 | | 2 | | | 2 |
| Remedial/Reluctant Readers | | | 2 | | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Literature Apprec./Study | | 3 | | 2 | 8 | 16 | | 2 | | 1 | | |
| Theme Work | | 1 | | | 2 | 3 | | | | | | |
| Story Telling | | 3 | | 2 | 1 | 2 | | 1 | | 1 | | |
| Reading Comprehension | | | | | 2 | 1 | | | | | | |
| Word Study/Spelling, etc. | 5 | 1 | 1 | | 6 | 3 | | | | | | |
| Drama | | 2 | | 1 | 4 | 8 | | | | | | |
| Listening Discrim./Compreh. | | 3 | | 2 | | 9 | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Reading Aloud Poetry/ Own Work, etc. | | | | | 1 | 3 | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Public Speaking | 1 | | | | 1 | 2 | | | | | | |
| Oral Work (e.g. interview-ing tech.) | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 4 | 1 | | | | | | |
| Work with Language in Context | | | | | 8 | 3 | | | | | | 1 |
| Miscellaneous | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | 1 |

lessons at each level especially since it was considered that lessons which attempted, for example:

> To introduce children to poems and prose, and to encourage discussion and writing. (English in Australia, No. 23, 1973)

tended to lack a focal objective as it was not always clear whether the poems and prose were central in and of themselves or whether they were more important as vehicles for the encouragement of discussion and writing.

The data in Table 1.1 are a very interesting reflection of

1 the problems with objectives in the area of English which have been mentioned in the previous section (see the multiple aims columns);
2 the reality that, where listening and/or speaking are specified as objectives, they are most often incorporated with some other objective (again see multiple aims columns);
3 the reading-writing dominance of the English curriculum interpretations in practice of teachers since 14 of the 64 headings ranging over 17 headings in the Secondary Specific Aims column were for specific unity practice, 11 relating to reading, 6 to vocabulary, etc., 6 to oral work, none to listening and 8 to work with language in context.

The nature of the oracy work, while often intrinsically interesting, seems to be haphazard and almost coincidental. This view of oracy teaching is supported by the CETCA group in general, the spokesman for whom reported that, in his view, there seems to be relatively little group work or direct encouragement of talk in the English classroom in Australia. Where some interest in oracy was evinced, he went on to say, it tended to be directed towards formal talks and debates rather than the encouragement of a broad spectrum of talk-oriented activities.

The study by Hardcastle (1976), although it sought to explore the views of only a small number of teachers, also provided support for the view of oracy practices in schools that seems to be emerging thus far. Hardcastle found that the majority of teachers she surveyed had received little, if any, specific direction in their own teacher education course about how to deal with this area. Moreover, at the secondary level, it was mainly those teachers who had attended private schools who had had oracy teaching themselves - largely from specialist speech and drama teachers, rather than under the general aegis of English.

However, regardless of the background and training of the teachers themselves, the group of teachers surveyed by Hardcastle reported similar practices in their own teaching. The majority reported that their teaching programs at least 'occasionally' include impromptu speeches, prepared speeches, and debates, but that they 'never' include such things as prepared prose readings, memorized poetry or prose selections, making introductions, using the telephone. The exceptions to this pattern were teachers who had been educated in America and 'often' or 'regularly' included the whole range of oral activities.

Hardcastle's teachers were invited to comment on the oral competence of their students, most respondents agreeing that in addition to acknowledged individual differences, their students were not competent in oral skills. The teachers, and this also included those who reported that their programs included little or no oral work, felt that oral work was very important. Only 20 per cent reported that they felt it was equal in importance to literacy and, although some gave no indication of preferred weighting, others specified that oral work should account for 20-30 per cent of the total English program. Nearly 70 per cent indicated that they felt that oral work should not be assessed but, since the questionnaire used did not also tap attitudes to the assessment of written work, this may reflect a general attitude to assessment rather than to the assessment of oral work per se and indicates the need to exercise caution in interpreting this particular finding. Nevertheless the general direction of Hardcastle's findings suggests the necessity for a much more extensive study of classroom practices in the area of oracy.

In the survey by Duff and Clark (1976), a sample of 883 primary school teachers in the six Australian states answered 37 categories of questions concerning the teaching of listening skills. The general pattern of initial training was similar for each state, with less than half of the teachers reporting that they have taken an integrated course in oral language arts, and half indicating separate courses in one or more of the language arts subjects.

Very few teachers - only 20 per cent - consistently taught listening as a separate subject. The great majority (86 per cent) taught it as part of other lessons (20 per cent) as part of language arts lessons, and about 10 per cent reported a combination of the two approaches. Varied approaches were used more by female teachers and those teaching the lower grades. In the teaching of listening most teachers either use a plan developed by them-

selves, or followed no fixed plan. About 12 per cent were guided by a plan recommended in a text, but only 4 per cent followed plans presented by their Education Department (as one might expect from the paucity of suitable prescribed syllabuses - see Chapter Two.)

Although respondents to the Duff and Clark questionnaire varied greatly in the frequency of usage of technical aids, 93 per cent reported use of records, 81 per cent tapes or cassettes, 90 per cent radio, and television 82 per cent. Tapes, films and television were used more in higher grades and records and radio more in lower grades. In this context it is interesting to note that some 15 per cent to one-third of teachers reported inadequate equipment of various kinds needed to use the above media. Approximately 40 per cent of the teachers in the survey indicated use of 'programmed' material but this was mostly limited to the listening skill builders in the SRA reading kits. About one-third reported no knowledge of suitable listening programs, 13 per cent had insufficient funds and 11 per cent thought they were not necessary.

Duff and Clark (1976) noted that survey respondents' methods of assessing children's progress in listening tended to be relatively unsophisticated. Standardized achievement tests were used by only 19 per cent of the sample, and standardized diagnostic tests by only 13 per cent. Teacher-made achievement tests were used by approximately 4 in 10 teachers whereas teacher-made diagnostic tests were used by about 2 in 10. Only 55 per cent of all respondents - and much the same percentage in every state - used informed methods to test different listening skills. The various methods used could be arranged into several groups, which, in descending order of importance, are observing or questioning individual children (reported by 6 per cent of the sample); games (4 per cent); and activities which include following instructions (4 per cent).

It was concluded by Duff and Clark (1976) that teachers were not as well informed about the teaching of listening as they should be. The implications of their survey were summed up as follows:

> ... the most important ones are to develop and extend present practices and approaches that appear to have promise; and to do as much as possible to eliminate, or at least minimise, the difficulties and shortcomings revealed. All those concerned with primary schooling could be involved in some way and many aspects of such education could receive attention, including the siting and design of classrooms with a view to improving acoustic conditions; conditions within the school; the material help

provided - equipment, programs, tests, etc; the information given to teachers - better course outlines, for example; the advisory services available; initial and in-service teacher training; and, not least, actual teaching practices. (Duff and Clark, 1976:134)

## The Education of Teachers of English/Language Arts

### The Pre-Service Level

Hitherto, apart from what might be gleaned from a study of the relevant handbooks from the various Teacher Education Institutions or a particular knowledge of those places with which one had been associated as student/staff member, there has been relatively little access to information about what is happening in teacher education in the broad area encompassed by English. Hence, the National Committee on English Teaching, which was established late in 1974 as a result of the UNESCO Seminar on the Teaching of English held in May/June 1972, accepting the recommendations of the Seminar, saw as one of its primary tasks a survey of the current state of teacher education in the area in Australia.

Consequently the NCET Teacher Education Project was conceived of as an all-encompassing descriptive survey of the state of pre-service, in-service and post-graduate teacher education in English/Language Arts/English Methodology in all of the teacher education institutions in Australia. This, together with a comparative study of a sample of similar institutions in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States of America, and a cross-sectional survey of the perceptions of graduates of different years' standing of their teacher education, formed the basis of the final report of the survey, the third and final volume of which was completed in 1979[1].

The data collection for the Australian institutions had been almost completed at the time this overview was written and it was possible to make some comments, albeit tentative, about the patterns which seemed to be emerging in the area relevant to the current study of the oracy of Australian primary and junior secondary school children.

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1 The report was prepared and written for the NCET by a research team directed by Dr Diana F. Davis (NCET, 1980).

In terms of courses relating to oracy actually required of students undertaking teacher education courses in the various tertiary institutions, the survey had thus far revealed a significant lack of such courses. Only one University Department of English to date had evinced concern about what, in one other institution, is termed Spoken Literature - at least to the extent of ensuring that a proportion of the course time is devoted to this area in practical sessions. No University Departments of English had reported that they offer practical as well as theoretical courses in drama. In all the University Departments of English for which the data had been processed, none reported that there is a direct oral component built into the assessment of students. Some departments require a minimum percentage attendance at seminar sessions but presence rather than participation seems to be the decisive variable. In such departments, reading and writing seemed to hold undisputed sway.

University Faculties of Education, too, tended not to require students to undertake formal course work in this area. However there are important differences in that many University Education Departments had a Speech Consultant whose task it was to work with all students in the course and whose work was not necessarily specific to those likely to become teachers in the areas encompassed by English. Such departments also very often offered electives on Creative Drama, or other aspects such as Radio Drama but, of course, these are available to the few rather than the many.

The Colleges seemed to be much more likely to offer personal development type courses in areas like Communications and they also had a range of Speech and Drama offerings which, again, tended to be elective rather than compulsory. Many members of staff in these institutions expressed concern about the oracy of their students (as, indeed, they do about their literacy) and the need for 'remedial' action in this area.

The picture which emerges is a relatively barren one and the implications of this for teaching practice in the area are bleak indeed, especially if one follows the line argued by Pullan:

> Our students will make their mark upon the Society around them in direct proportion to the amount of opportunity we give them to develop their oral-communicational abilities during school years. It is often too late to recover ground when the student reaches the tertiary level of education. If a student has been silent for five or six years of secondary education it is difficult to expect him to emerge suddenly from this silence an orally communicative being. (Pullan, 1967:56)

## The Inservice Level

As part of the data collection for the present Study, English and (where appropriate) Speech/Drama Subject Teachers' Associations in each State were approached regarding their inservice activities in the oracy area during the period 1975-1976. This request yielded three replies which indicated that this area had not been a central focus of any of those Associations' activities during the specified period, although all indicated that questions relating to speaking and listening came up inevitably but incidentally as a result of discussing the language theme.

The survey reported by Duff and Clark (1976) included data on in-service training in oral language arts at the primary school level in Australia. Sixty-three per cent of the 883 teachers surveyed in all Australian states reported no in-service training in this area, and only 19 per cent had received any during the 5 years preceding the survey (at the end of 1972).

The report concludes:

> The teachers in the sample are on average not remarkable for the amount of professional reading that they do - 41 per cent reading no journals regularly and 38 per cent making no reference to the use, during the preceding two years, of any text on oral language. Those who do the most reading of both types tend to have more teaching experience; but most teachers who use these sources of information, refer to only one or two journals or one or two texts.
>
> Most informal assistance on the teaching of listening which respondents have received since completing their initial training comes from other teachers within their schools - 68 per cent from other classroom teachers and 52 per cent from head teachers. (Duff and Clark, 1976:114)

## Breakdown or Breakthrough?

While the 1976 review presented above attempted to be as thoroughgoing as possible in the central areas which were delineated as Current Curriculum Statements, Teaching Practices, Relevant Research and Teacher Education, the time scale for this first stage of the total ERDC Oracy Project necessitated curtailment in some areas. The problems with gaining a completely accurate holding of current Curriculum Statements are outlined in Chapter Two. There was seen to be a need for a thoroughgoing study of practices in the schools, including not only what occurs in classrooms, but also encompassing the teachers' own curriculum and evaluation strategies.

The gaps in teacher education in the oracy area and the general lack of specificity in the curriculum statements themselves suggested the absolute necessity of further insight into classroom practices before attempting to move into the equally vital area of individual performance.

There is a multiplicity of both curriculum and research questions in the area of oracy which require investigation and exploration. Golub (1969) reports that the growth of linguistic performance in oral language is in advance of that in written language. Gibson et al (1966) concluded that their subjects wrote in one style and spoke in another, a conclusion which is supported by the later Australian study of Davis (1973).

One of Hardcastle's (1976) respondents commented that he 'would like to see Australian Davis Cup players speak as well as their U.S. counterparts'. In fact, we know very little about the oral skills of Australian students and even less about comparative levels of skill between students in Australian, American and British schools. How, too, does the level of oracy compare with that of literacy? To what extent do the two develop in tandem?

Although most curriculum statements acknowledge the importance of oracy skills, at least in theory, there is little differentiation made between providing fairly random opportunities for students to exercise oral skills and specifically designing spoken English activities to develop the skills of communication. Just as an appropriate range of literacy skills does not develop in a vacuum, nor do those of oracy. While most students come to school able to listen and to speak, although obviously with varying levels of expertise, the development of communicative competence is a function of teachers being in a position to guide students through a distinct but integrated program focussing on both oracy and literacy.

In order to do so, of course, teachers themselves must be conversant with the development and function of spoken and written language. This points very clearly to the necessity, in any study concerning itself with curriculum and student performance, to encompass also the ramifications for teacher education, both preservice and inservice.

In recent years much has been written suggesting a breakthrough to literacy as a consequence of new knowledge and fresh approaches to teaching. The evidence about standards of performance in this area is equivocal, however. There is little or no evidence at all on oracy levels. This

general failure to attempt a mapping of performances in listening and speaking is remarkable in the light of a consensus of opinion about the prime importance of skills in oracy. It represents a major breakdown in education that to some extent is rectified in the study of performance reported in Section C of this report.

CHAPTER TWO

# THE PLACE OF ORACY IN AUSTRALIAN CURRICULA

## Introduction

At the request of the Education Research and Development Committee, a documentation of the state-of-the-art in oracy in Australia was undertaken towards the end of 1976. The overview presented in Chapter One and a detailed analysis of curriculum documents were included in a report submitted to ERDC at the beginning of 1977 as a preliminary to the study of oracy skills to be undertaken subsequently by the Australian Council for Educational Research. This chapter represents a summary of the curriculum section of this report; it is presented as an historical perspective and no attempt has been made to update the material by including more recent developments.

The general findings of this review of Australian curriculum documents are presented in this chapter in five sections:

1 General assumptions and emphases;
2 Aims and objectives;
3 Practical suggestions for teaching and resource books and materials;
4 Approaches to evaluation of listening and speaking;
5 Balance of emphases in developing listening and speaking skills in relation to the whole syllabus.

Documents consulted are listed in a bibliography presented in Appendix One.

Initial information was acquired from two published sources based on earlier studies of primary and secondary curricula in Australia:-

1 Report of Curriculum Officers' Conference on Primary Schools English, Melbourne, August 30 - September 3, 1971, Australian Council for Educational Research, including position papers from all States;
2 The Teaching of English. Report of the Australian UNESCO Seminar on the Teaching of English, Sydney, May 29 - June 2, 1972. Australian Government Publishing Service - including a background paper on English Curricula in Australia.

In addition, recent curriculum statements were sought by both oral and written requests to State Education Department Curriculum and Research Branches, and to State Associations for the Teaching of English. Although there was a response from each State Education Department, this did not necessarily bring to light all the materials available to them. Further checking was not possible in the brief time scale for the report to ERDC. It must be noted, too, that curriculum materials in the traditional sense were no longer necessarily either prescribed for teachers or reflective of the status quo at the time. Nevertheless the investigators made the assumption that curriculum statements (and related documents) might reasonably be expected to provide a general framework within which teachers could construct and organize their own curricula taking into account the special needs, characteristics and constraints of their own particular teaching context.

## General Assumptions and Emphases

At the time of the survey, although some offered a general rationale, no State Department of Education offered a theoretical rationale for curriculum statements at either the primary or the secondary level. At the primary level, for those states which provided a preamble, there was a general recognition of the interaction between experience and language development, and of the need to emphasize the development of language in context. For those states which offered a general rationale at the junior secondary level, there tended to be an explicit emphasis on the communicative aspects of language. No state provided a rationale of any kind for its senior secondary program, most such programs being fairly prescriptive.

There was variation between states in the relative emphases placed on facets of language development in the primary school. In only one, Queensland, was the language arts program deliberately differentiated into separate syllabi for the four areas of communication - listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, in this case, special emphasis was placed on the interdependence and integration of these areas. The core of the program in this state aimed to develop self-expression, social communication and language experience. Mastery and utilization of language reception (input) and expression (output) skills were seen as very important features of the learning process. Emphasis was placed on listening and speaking in the lower school, with special reference to the need to train children in listening skill areas - attentive listening, courteous listening, listening

for information and comprehension, critical listening and listening for pleasure. Speaking was treated in a dynamic context involving expression through language and movement.

In the Queensland rationale for listening/observing skills development it was noted that:

> Listening and observing are complex communication processes based on the skills of hearing and seeing and involve cognitive processes of selection, understanding, evaluation and responding. These thinking processes are closely related to the other receptive communication process of reading. The reading competence of a child is considerably influenced by his listening and observing skill development.
>
> It appears more difficult to develop the higher skills (e.g. analysis and judgement) for listening and observing than it is for reading. In reading, the speed of intake of information is determined by the reader who has time to pause, consider, reread, select details, form judgements and note sequences. By contrast, the listener/observer has to select, visualize, evaluate and recall significant details at a pace usually determined by another.
>
> Listening and observing, and speaking also have an affinity but its nature is not clearly established. At the least they are complementary activities.

The Victorian syllabus offered the following rationale for listening.

> Listening is a most vital part of the communication process. It has already been emphasized that listening is basic to the acquisition and development of language. The normal child grows up in a world of sound. In recent years more and more research has been carried out in the area of reception; it is now realised it is a far more significant and complex process than was once thought. Listening goes beyond hearing and involves the areas of cognition, short term money and auditory discrimination. In short, the process of being able to listen is basic to the entire area of language performance; we need to be able to listen to use language and we need language in order to listen.

The rationale for the speaking section of the primary language arts program in Queensland stated that:

> Linguistic studies have shown us that a child achieves a great deal in speaking before he comes to school. In the pre-school years, his language develops through listening and observing and he learns to talk, create sentences of his own, master basic sentence patterns and acquire vocabulary to suit his needs. The primary school program should enrich the child's spoken language so that he can improve his oral competence in order to communicate socially and express his individual personality.

> Guiding the child towards effective speaking involves enriching the whole personality. To give opportunities for development in all aspects of expression this component of the Guide is divided into three sections - Creative Speaking, Communicative Speaking, and Speech Technique. Some parts of the course are designed to help the child to appreciate the thoughts and feelings of other people; others, to foster his desire to express his own ideas in fluent language.

Another state placed specific emphasis on reading and writing in its primary curriculum statement. No mention was made of listening skills although a handbook on oral communication was undergoing revision in order to overcome this deficiency. By way of contrast, another state placed special emphasis on speaking, the section on Spoken English being more than twice as long as either the section on Reading or the one on Written English.

For the secondary level in one state, there was an almost total absence of documented syllabus material. In another, the syllabus for years 7 - 10 did not offer any details of the organization of English at any level. It did, however, make a number of assumptions about the nature of the courses, such as 'English should be an active pursuit' and pupils should engage in 'purposeful language activities', but there was small indication as to what this involved. As the syllabus combined a high level of abstraction in the rationale with an extensive list of objectives, questions of emphasis or direction tended to be lost. One objective covered the development of listening skills in a variety of situations. This involved (for example) ability to relate observation to listening, especially in situations such as drama, film and television where the visual aspect is significant.

The same state offered three separate courses for Forms V and VI English, each involving a study of language and literature. One course outline noted that there was no rigid division between the two parts and every opportunity should be taken of making one illuminate the other. While no strict allocation of time to the different parts of the course was prescribed, it was suggested the literature work might occupy 75 per cent of the course and the language work 25 per cent. This course was differentiated from the two others 'by the larger area traversed, and by the depth and complexity of the treatment envisaged'. One of the other courses was intended to differ from previous practice in that the rather theoretical treatment of separate 'language topics' was to be replaced by a study of language more firmly based on the language which the student was reading, hearing and using. In the third course the aim was to integrate the reading, writing and speaking of English. Each element in the course was to involve

all these activities in varying degrees: 'reading issues naturally into discussion, writing consolidates what has been gained from reading'. Discussion of poems, novels, plays, films and television programs and activities like play-reading and debating were seen to provide further opportunities for individual expression in a variety of situations. However written expression was to occupy much more time than oral expression in the course with the aim of logical and coherent exposition of ideas.

In another state the secondary school English courses placed emphasis both on allowing the student to participate in situations that encourage him to use oral expression (without undue criticism of this expression such that it may tend to intimidate him) and on his becoming aware of different language situations. In this way the student was expected to develop his ability to speak and listen effectively. These were considered of equal importance with the development of the skills of reading and writing. At both the junior and senior secondary level in this state, curriculum statements encompassed all four areas of listening and speaking, reading and writing, but there was a separate syllabus at each level for speech and drama with its own aims and objectives.

One state gave special recognition in its junior secondary syllabus to the fact that it is difficult to assess many of the skills mentioned in the aims of speaking, listening, reading and writing but observed that 'writing lends itself more readily to an assessment grading than the activities of speaking, listening and reading which are not, however, to be overlooked. In this state the senior secondary syllabus was no longer concerned with the development of specific skills, as distinct from another state in which specific aims for oral expression were given because of its central importance to the entire program. This contrasts with yet another state which makes no reference to teaching specific skills in the areas of speaking or listening, the assumption being that students have already acquired these at an earlier stage as a natural development from exposure to a rich and varied experience of language and literature.

## Aims and Objectives

At the primary level, general aims and objectives in most state curricula demonstrated a concern for the development of imaginative and effective (accurate and concise) verbal communication through listening and spoken language, with self expression and personality enrichment an important by-product. Few states offered explicit guidance by way of specific objectives

however; one notable exception was Queensland.

In the Queensland lower school (grades 1 to 3) program for development of listening and observing, for example, there were 38 specific objectives grouped under habits and attitudes, and six skills areas. Over half of these were listed under perceptual skills embracing auditory perception, visual perception and factual comprehension. They involved identification, description, discrimination and classification ranging from specific sounds to sequence of events. Comprehension skills involved interpretation and inference based on perception of cause and effect relationships, comparison, prediction and generalization. Functional listening/observing covered the following of directions, acquisition of information, and problem solving. Creative response was spelt out under five objectives and appreciative listening under a further two. A similar set of objectives for listening/observing was given also for the middle and upper primary levels, thus giving teachers clear guidelines for more explicit formulation of directions for developing listening skills. The same applied to the speaking area.

Speaking skill development in Grades 1 to 3 was covered by a set of 25 objectives in 5 areas, viz. expression through movement, sensitivity to oral language, creative speaking, everyday speaking situations, and speaking for specific purposes. Ten of the objectives related to creative speaking involving original stories, descriptions and conversations, as well as oral interpretation of literature aimed at developing awareness and appreciation of the language of poetry and prose. Everyday speaking covered informal conversations and discussions, and the giving and receiving of messages and directions. Specific speaking objectives involved accurate descriptions, recognition and expression of relationships, clarification by specific criteria, sense of correct sequence and current usage conventions.

Although at the secondary level there was again wider variation between states in the amount of detailed specification of objectives, the NSW Secondary Schools Board syllabus for example reflected a general concern for competence in language through understanding and control of usage, vocabulary, structure and style in the context of everyday communication, communication in various media, literature and personal expression. The development of listening skills was spelt out in terms of auditory perception to discriminate the effect of pace, pitch, stress and pause on meaning and tone; ability to relate observation to listening; listening for meaning with emphasis on attention, accurate and selective listening; and critical

listening to evaluate content and performance in relation to meaning, form and values.

Speaking skills involved precision of thought; control of such things as rhythm, interaction, stress and pause; confidence in a variety of situations with different types of audiences; and beyond basic communication skills to the development of flair and artistry.

The Queensland syllabus provided by the Board of Secondary School Studies elaborated 25 goals of oracy under five main headings viz. creating an environment conducive to learning, experience with language, self expression through language, communication through language and the development of communication skills, most attention being devoted to the latter.

In South Australia, particular attention was given to appropriate verbal 'behaviour' in which oracy was distinguished by ability to speak confidently and coherently, and to listen with attention and discrimination. The former was emphasized in the West Australian Certificate Five Year Guide along with sincerity in expressing needs and showing ideas.

In Tasmania, the Schools Board Speech and Drama Syllabus provided more detail than the School Certificate Manual on speaking and listening which were covered in four sections: theory of spoken English, oral communication, drama and listening. The former dealt with the structure of Spoken English, phonetics, variety of pronunciation and an introduction to theories of language development. Listening was covered in terms of criteria of what to listen for, broadly classified in terms of listening for meaning, for method (as opposed to manner) and for oral technique.

Generally speaking, although broad aims in the oracy area were advanced at the secondary level, not a great deal of specification of detailed objectives was in evidence, with the major exceptions noted above.

## Practical Suggestions for Teaching

Some States provided little constructive advice to primary school teachers in terms of practical activities or resource materials for the development of listening and speaking skills. In some cases it seemed implicit that so long as children are given the opportunity to talk and listen, improvement of these skills will develop naturally.

Numerous suggestions were given in the Victorian Primary Schools English Committee Language Curriculum Statement (1974) to help teachers

plan lessons and activities to develop speaking and listening skills. The teacher was also given ideas as to how to arrange the classroom, and the attitudes needed to encourage listening. Skills were stressed, but it was emphasized that these were not to be treated in isolation. "Ideas to try" are presented to help teachers better appreciate the forms of listening that can take place in respect of the following list of skills:

a Auditory discrimination;
b Listening for main ideas;
c Listening for sequence of ideas and relationships;
d Listening for important details and irrelevances;
e Following directions;
f Making justifiable inferences;
g Distinguishing between facts and opinions;
h Using contextual clues to establish meaning;
i Listening for organizational elements and transitional phases;
j Interpreting mood or attitude;
k Detecting emotionally-toned words;
l Creative listening;
m Summarizing;
n Understanding connotative meaning of words;
o Understanding tentative meanings of words.

Numerous suggestions were given in the Victorian Curriculum Statement also for the development of speaking activities such as 'start with a character' (e.g. a pirate), 'requests', 'twenty questions', 'how to do the job'. There was no explicit or implicit organization in terms of types of skills, however.

In the Queensland Language Arts Curriculum Guide for Primary Schools (1974), detailed suggestions for teachers were listed against each of the detailed objectives referred to earlier in this chapter. For example, the following suggestions were given for the functional listening/observing objectives:

Objective: The Child listens and observes carefully to follow directions
Suggestions: The teacher
- encourages the child to adopt simple rules for attentive listening and observing
- provides opportunities to follow simple directions in classroom activities: giving out paper, pencils, books; playing games, e.g. Simon says: participating in lessons using radio and television.
(Teachers should be careful to note any defects which could indicate a hearing or seeing disability.)

- directs the child's attention to common directional signs, symbols and sounds and their importance:
  school bells; traffic signs and symbols; different coloured lights; railway crossing signs; boomgates; ambulance siren; fire alarm; postman's whistle; time signal on radio.

Objective: The Child solves problems through listening and observing
Suggestions: The teacher
- encourages the child to gather relevant information from school and home environment.
- encourages child to find answers to his own question
  e.g. Why can't we play outside the tuckshop?
  Why do we need a road safety patrol?
  Why shouldn't we run on the school verandahs or around the pool?
  Why do magpies sometimes chase us?

Objective: The Child acquires information through listening and observing
Suggestions: The teacher
- leads the child to an understanding of the importance of oral language for acquiring information.
- provides opportunities for acquiring information using:
  planned and spontaneous conversations and discussions; books on specific subjects related to the child's interests; radio and television programs; newspaper and magazine items; telephone conversations; tape recordings and listening posts.

Objective: The Child develops interest through listening and observing
Suggestions: The teacher
- provides opportunities for the child to listen to and observe a wide variety of subjects through a variety of media, e.g.
  audio-visual aids;
  newspapers, magazines;
  discussions and talks (peers, teachers, visitors).
- fosters the child's interests as they become evident in everyday activities, e.g. rock collections; pets; hobbies.

Objective: The Child listens and observes to develop effective communication
Suggestions: The teacher
- creates an atmosphere where conversation is valued.
- encourages discussions on a variety of interesting topics.
- provides frequent opportunities for conversation and discussions:
  show, share and tell;
  child-child, child-class, teacher-child discussions;
  evaluation of work;
  individual, pair, group assignments;
  role playing;
  making announcements;
  reporting back to research;
  discussion of television and radio programs;
  science experiments and demonstrations;
  following instructions (dance, paper folding);
  reproducing radio or television commercials.

Similar detailed samples of practical activities were provided in the WA Primary Syllabus on Oral English (1968) for lower, middle and upper grades separately under the categories of oral expression, listening and speech training.

At the secondary level, not all states provide detailed suggestions for practical activities. Indeed in some cases it seems that listening is seen as a habit which arises naturally if students have the right attitudes (whatever these may be) and oracy will follow as a 'natural consequence' of pupil interaction based on interested, enjoyable, attentive participation. No resource materials are suggested to elaborate general suggestions about listening or speaking development.

By contrast, the Queensland Board of Secondary School Studies listed in its English syllabus appropriate media and activities for each set of goals. The approach is illustrated in Table 2.1. In the Speech and Drama syllabus at both Junior and Senior levels similar detail was evident in the learning experience listed for each objective.

## Approaches to Evaluation

In general, little detailed advice on the evaluation of oracy skills was made available to primary teachers through curriculum documents. However the Victorian Primary Schools English Committee Language Curriculum Statement (1974) advised that:

> Evaluation should be a vital part of any curriculum. But it should not be an appendage, something 'done' only at a recognized end point. In developing a really functional curriculum, all aspects of evaluation are on-going, so that the classroom teacher, the administrator, and the curriculum developer alike have constant feedback so that the curriculum can be changed as the need arises.

It was suggested that children themselves should be involved in the evaluation process (as 'their own diagnosticians'). Teachers were urged to develop informed judgement as a critical component of successful teaching and bibliographies for further reading are provided.

> They should attempt to record the changing interests and attitudes of children, their imaginative and emotional response to language situations, and their ability to make rational decisions. So much of contemporary curricula relates to attitudes and interests, that as purposeful teachers, we must become involved with their evaluation.

Special emphasis was placed on the notion that evaluation of pupils' development in oracy must not emphasize competition between children, 'the only comparison which is relevant for making decisions about further

Table 2.1: Queensland Board of Secondary School Studies Lists of Speaking Skills, Media and Activities

| Speaking | Expression-Communication Skills | Register | Mediums | Purpose of Communication | Participation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The student will demonstrate an ability to ... | | when speaking in | ... | which ... | from ... to ... |
| Aim 1: Goals 1,2,3 | Formulate and communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings with precision | Formal | Conversation<br>Discussion<br>Telephone | Impart information | Person to person |
| Aim 2: Goals 6,7 | Organize ideas with logic and coherence | Semi-formal | Interviews<br>Forum | Express feelings | Person to group |
| Aim 3: Goals 9,10, 11 | Use words, idioms, and syntax appropriately | Intimate | Panel<br>Debates<br>Speeches | Entertain | Person within group |
| Aim 4: Goals 12,13, 14,15 | Use phrasing, stress, rhythm, pause, pitch, pace, volume effectively | | Oral Reports<br>Lecturettes<br>Votes of thanks | Persuade<br>Respond | |
| Aim 5: Goals 21,22, 23,24,25(Skills) | Interpret orally the meaning of a passage | | Introductions<br>Greetings<br>Speeches of welcome | | |
| (All those goals are likely to be inter-related in any one learning experience) | | | Prose reading<br>Mock broadcasts<br>Dramatic situations<br>Individual and choral poetry recitation | | |

teaching is that which compares the child's present performance with his past'. Evaluation must be of the whole child. It is no longer considered appropriate to evaluate the acquisition of skills in isolation. Evaluation is considered of vital importance but as an on-going process, not as an end in itself.

Another area of concern was that:

> Evaluation is not synonymous with testing. Testing may indeed provide one valuable source of information for making decisions, but also useful are anecdotal records, formal observations of the child's 'behaviour', the opinions of the children, their parents and other teachers. Although it is often difficult to derive strict measurements from some of this information, that is no reason to disregard subjective data which could provide valuable insights. Tests, are only a part of the evaluation process.

The Western Australian publication, Primary School English: Introductory Notes emphasizes the need for continuous recording of an individual's progress:

> Since the current approach to teaching is child centred, with emphasis on individual needs, it follows that individual pupil performance should be evaluated and that individual records be kept. These records will become a basis for the program in English and provide a guide for working with pupils with similar needs. Care should be taken that recording does not become an onerous time-consuming chore - it should be purposeful and indicate basic areas that require attention. Some ways of recording include:
>
> 1. Descriptive comments. Comments are made, in diary style, noting each child's specific needs and progress. These records may be cumulative, carried over from year to year.
> 2. A collection of the child's own written work. This may be done periodically and be included with the descriptive comments in a file for each child.
> 3. A checklist. Such a record lists specific skills to be acquired and shows which children have mastered each skill. This form of recording is most appropriate as a short term record of specific skills in a particular area, e.g. phonics, dictionary skills, handwriting skills.

The effectiveness of evaluation and subsequent recording will depend to a great extent upon the experience and background knowledge of the teacher. A good understanding of child language development is essential before specific objectives can be formulated and children's needs analysed in terms of these.

In the Queensland Language Arts Curriculum Guide for Primary Schools teachers were asked to consider evaluation as a continuous process throughout the year at two levels - qualitative and quantitative. Standardised tests were seen to be useful in supporting the teacher's personal judgement. Whether subjective or objective evaluation was used, it was recommended that information gained can be recorded in cumulative record cards or by means of the teacher's profile of individual children. However, the information gained about attitudes, skills and their application becomes of great value only if the teacher uses the data gathered, not for the purpose of grading children, but to measure the value of his language arts program to each child, and to effect any changes made necessary by that information.

Checklists are provided to help the teacher organize his viewpoints and to support his personal judgements, and to serve as a means of self-evaluation by both teacher and pupil. The following items directly relevant to oracy assessment are extracted from the Queensland Guide.

Receptive Areas of Language

Teacher Self-Evaluation

Do I

- improve the child's ability to listen, observe and read by developing systematically the skills of auditory and visual perception?
- provide opportunities for the development of skills or oral and silent reading?
- develop the child's ability to comprehend what he hears, observes and reads?
- develop the child's ability to follow directions, acquire information and communicate with others?
- develop the child's ability to think critically about what he hears, observes and reads?
- encourage the child to respond creatively to what he hears, observes and reads?
- lead the child to develop a sensitivity to spoken and written language through literature?
- guide the children to evaluate critically TV, films and other media?

Observation of the Child

Does the child

- apply in listening, observing and reading situations the appropriate skills of auditory and visual perception?
- try to comprehend what he hears, observes and reads?
- react critically to the ideas secured through listening, observing and reading?
- organize the ideas secured through reading, listening and observing, and apply them to new situations?
- develop his ability to communicate through effective listening, observing and reading?
- interpret an excerpt from literature creatively?
- practice self-evaluation?

Child Self-Evaluation

Do I

- listen and observe carefully?
- give attention to voice production when I read to an audience?
- identify important sounds and symbols?
- try to remember what I hear, observe and read?
- think about what I hear, observe and read - check facts, compare ideas, look for proof of statements, check conclusions?
- listen, observe and read to improve the way I express my ideas, thoughts and feelings?
- listen, observe or read to appreciate stories, poems, films, music, art?
- make judgements about TV, films, radio, newspapers?
- try to increase my vocabulary and use it effectively?

Expressive Areas of Language

Teacher Self-Evaluation

Do I

- foster free, courteous interchange of ideas within the classroom?
- train each child to express himself clearly and in logical sequence using oral language skills?

- respect each child's inherent language competence?
- understand, tolerate and encourage children who study English as a second language?
- listen attentively and courteously to the child and respond appropriately to his questions and comments?
- praise a good performance and make corrections tactfully?
- train each child in the special skills needed to communicate effectively factual information?
- provide opportunities for the development in context of the technique of speaking and mechanics of writing?
- provide a developmental program to overcome special speaking and writing problems?
- aim to increase and enrich the child's speaking and writing vocabulary?
- balance the skills of expression with the content in a well-considered evaluation scheme?
- encourage the child to evaluate his own speaking, and to proof-read, edit and evaluate his own writing?
- devise activities to foster the child's oral and written expression in a variety of social situations both formal and informal?
- stimulate the child, through experiences and literature, to express himself through movement and literary forms?
- provide a program of story-telling, and exercises to give enjoyment and develop sensitivity to language?
- provide good quality models of sincere expressive speaking and writing?
- remain aware of the value of clear, precise language in all subject disciplines?

Observation of the Child

Does he

- speak naturally, sincerely and courteously at all times?
- use correct speaking technique in an unaffected manner?
- express his ideas, thoughts and feelings clearly and fluently in his own words in oral and written language?
- participate adequately in informal situations such as everyday conversations and discussions?

- perform competently and confidently in formal situations such as giving messages, directions, introductions, interviews?
- use patterns of spoken and written language appropriate to different social situations?
- report factual information accurately in oral and written language?
- understand the function of words and use them correctly?
- support statements with valid reasons?
- describe and identify people, places and things through a widely developed vocabulary?
- retell stories in logical sequences?
- create original descriptions, stories, plays, dialogue orally and in written form?
- participate through speaking and movement in role-playing situations?
- understand the function of words?
- try to increase and enrich his speaking and writing vocabulary?

Child Self Evaluation

Do I

- look at the members of my audience when I am speaking and try to keep them interested?
- think well and organize my thoughts in correct sequence before expressing them?
- speak courteously at all times with my classmates and other people?
- speak and write what I want to say in clear, simple words?
- try to overcome any weaknesses in my oral and written expression?
- remember the rules of grammar and syntax when I structure sentences?
- modulate my voice to match the speaking situation?
- give clear directions, explanations, messages and announcements?
- use suitable words and greetings when I am speaking on the telephone?
- take part in discussions, keeping to the point, giving good reasons for what I say and respecting other's opinions?
- try to use interesting words when I tell a story or relate a personal experience?
- express myself creatively through poetry, speaking, dramatic expression, puppetry and role-playing?

At the secondary level, although some states gave no direct or specific guidance regarding a rationale for or methods of evaluating oracy skills, there would seem to be a common recognition of the need for continuous assessment in a number of mediums appropriate to each of the skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing. It seems that in general, emphasis is placed on the latter area. Indeed some concern is expressed about the feasibility of much assessment in other areas because of the time involved in collecting individual data and the difficulty of assessment itself.

One state specifically condemns 'the old form of rigid and stereotyped testing', and encourages more informal use of project work and individual observation over time to evaluate the student activities suggested in advisory notes which 'should give teachers sufficient guidance and information on how and what to test'. However, the use of testing for diagnostic purposes in the early part of the year is supported.

General guidelines for oracy assessment provided by the Board of Secondary School Studies in Queensland are reproduced in Figure 2.1.

## Balance of Emphases

Although syllabi frequently lacked specificity in terms of detailed objectives and activities, general emphases were developed for teachers and the following highlights have been selected in attempt to provide a perspective on the over-all balance.

The syllabus for New South Wales Primary Schools appeared to place considerable emphasis on the importance of listening and talking.

> Opportunities for listening and talking arise naturally and continually. Whenever opportunities occur a pupil is encouraged to talk from his own experiences and to increase his understanding by listening to others ... Each talking situation simultaneously involves a listening situation in which both speaker and listener are active. By varying classroom organization, different talking-listening situations are created allowing for degrees of interaction amongst pupils.

The syllabus describes the process of listening as involving four steps - hearing, understanding, evaluating and responding. The following points are listed to illustrate the importance of an effective listening program which, it is claimed:

> develops a classroom climate favourable to listening - this involves a sympathetic and supportive audience, an atmosphere of acceptance and an area free from other distracting noises and activities;

Guidelines for the Assessment of Student Achievement in Listening/Observing and Reading

When assessing the student's abilities in reading and listening/observing, it is necessary to rely on his responses, written or oral, to the reading and listening/observing situations. Unavoidably then, not only his abilities in reading and listening are being assessed, but also his skills in writing and speaking.

Suggested Types of Assessment

1 Objective Tests (See School Assessment Procedures No. 5: Assessment in English, Research and Curriculum Branch, Department of Education, Queensland).

2 Individual Oral Test.

3 Combination of Objective and Short Answer Tests.

Tests of reading and listening/observing skills should be constructed to incorporate a progression from lower-order to higher-order comprehension skills. In this way the score obtained in these tests reflects the stage in comprehension the student has reached.

Assessment of Speaking

Assessment of oral work can best be achieved through continuous assessment. Terminal tests eliminate any chance of a student's using the language for "specific genuine purposes", and indeed produce a rather artificial audience, the teacher-as-assessor. Assessment should take place:

i In a genuine communicating situation including a listening-participating group; and

ii Over as wide a variety of situations as possible.

Marking

1 Grading should be based on a total impression of the effectiveness of the communication.

2 The total pattern of skills should be observed so that no one factor over-rides all others. For example, most communication activities would include content, organization, use of language, delivery (audibility, clarity, expressiveness), interaction with listeners. See sample check list below.

3 Accents should not be penalized (e.g. Migrant or Broad Australian Vowel Sounds), but slovenly speech should be (e.g. elision, 'ere, lib'ry).

4 Progressive evaluation in informal speech settings (e.g. group discussions) should be included.

5 Constant numerical assessment should be avoided lest it distract attention from critical comments made by peers and teachers.

Sample Checklist for Assessment of Speaking

Name .....

| | A | B | C | D | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Content | x | | | | |
| Organization | | x | | | |
| Use of Language | | x | | | |
| Delivery | | | x | | |
| Audience Interaction | x | | | | |

General Impression Mark 8 out of 10

Appreciative Comments:

.....

.....

Other categories could be added to such a checklist. "Delivery", for example, might be divided into "audibility", "clarity" and "effectiveness". "Appropriate use of register" and "achievement of purpose relating to audience" might be included.

Possible marking schemes for communication and oral interpretation may be found in Christabel Burniston, Creative Oral Assessment.

When assessing oral response to literary experience, more emphasis should be placed on content and appreciation than on the speaking skill itself. However, as with the literary essay, it is difficult to separate the ability to communicate from the quality of the communication itself.

Figure 2.1 Extract from the Queensland Board of Secondary School Studies Guidelines for the Assessment of Student Achievement in Listening/Observing, Reading and Speaking

- provides for a balance in the various listening skills;
- sets up purposes for listening and encourages responses;
- uses stories, poems, songs, plays and talks from the media and other sources;
- provides listening areas in which individual children and small groups may carry on listening activities when desirable.

The approach of the syllabus to Talking appears to be that, so long as children are given the opportunity to talk, their skill in expressing their ideas, feelings and imagination will naturally develop. In the New South Wales Speech and Drama Notes: Primary and Infants (1975):

> Conversation is the most important aspect of language as it is the most ready and spontaneous means of communication throughout a person's life. It would be a fallacy to separate conversation into a limited category and expect to teach it in a classroom situation, especially since much of the equipment for ordinary conversation has already been developed in the child's formative years. This "equipment" would be a spontaneous urge to communicate as part of the socialization process, and a desire to experiment with the fascinating tool of language.
>
> Conversation situations are governed by their own principles and very little can really be 'taught'.

In the Victorian Primary Schools English Committee Language Curriculum Statement (1974), the two broad divisions of oracy and literacy appear to be accorded equal importance. It is recognized they are interrelated and cannot be treated separately. However, 'listening' is now recognized as an extremely important area:

> Listening is a most vital part of the communication process... we need to be able to listen to use language and we need language in order to listen.
>
> Listening is the first of the four language areas which develops, and leads directly to speech. It continues to play a vital role in a child's language development throughout his time in primary school. Hence listening is of the utmost importance right through primary school and for this reason stories and poems should be told and read to children not only in Beginners, but also through to Grade 6.
>
> Hence, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are closely related aspects of language, and each contributes to the development of the other. They cannot be separated from one another in a child's language development.

In the Queensland Language Arts Curriculum Guide for Primary Schools (1974) the importance of learning skills was stressed as indicated in the following extracts:

The word 'skills' can be interpreted as correct or effective ways of working with particular materials. Thus, skills can be learnt by children. Within the scope of the language arts, the skills involved vary in form and in levels of difficulty, and, until the child has learnt these skills, used them and related them to his experiences, he will find it difficult to develop his language so that he may attain full growth as an individual.

The skills of the language arts are integral parts of the inter-related processes of listening, speaking, reading and writing which are designed to increase the child's control over all aspects of communication. While the integrated nature of the language arts should always be emphasized, the basic skills of the four areas mentioned can be identified separately. There are points of similarity as well as of difference within these communication areas, but the threads of skills can be drawn together to shape a fabric with a well organized language pattern. Arranged in two pair groups, the skill areas show a close resemblance, e.g. in the areas of language reception (listening and reading), and expression (speaking and writing).

At the primary school level, each communication skill contains two elements:

(a) the activity context in which skills are taught, e.g. the pupil is involved in using a variety of materials from simple stories, poems and plays;

(b) the basic skills of mechanics that relate to the special area, e.g. auditory and visual discrimination and comprehension skills.

This statement means that the skills of language are rarely taught to children in isolation, but actively support language development during a sequence of appropriate learning experiences.

It appears, then, that the language skills include sets of 'low order thinking' skills and sets of 'high order thinking' skills with many gradations in between.

Clearly, a sure knowledge of language skills is an essential ingredient of effective creative and communicative expression and a necessity for the acquisition of language and the reception of ideas through language.

The four skills of listening and speaking, reading and writing appear to be accorded equal importance. All processes are seen as an integrated whole; each area is not important on its own as such, but all areas are important because of the interaction between them.

In the Western Australian guide, oral work is presented as an integral part of all of the activities which take place in the school. Oral expression opportunities which are provided are to contribute to such aims as:

1 Developing an attitude of courtesy and consideration for others in speech situations.

2 Developing confidence and the desire to speak freely.

3 Forming and developing good listening habits.

By the end of the primary school the syllabus seeks to have children realise the following aims:

1 To develop a desire to use a correct and appropriate speech form.

2 To develop an attitude of constructive critical appraisal of his own speech and that of others.

3 To develop a realization of the need to continue the development of the habitual vocabulary.

4 To understand the procedures or form required for formal speech situations.

5 Be aware of correct forms of speech and make them habitual.

## Overview

The paucity even of general rationale probably provides the key to what would seem to be a significant omission in the formulation of the various States' Curriculum Statements. This key, it is surmised, lies in the lack of knowledge about language development in the later years. The curriculum developer seeking to provide even a modestly adequate theoretical rationale for many of the courses in English promulgated at the time of the survey would find it extremely difficult, it not impossible, to do so. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that many of these courses were heavily biassed towards reading and writing, at least in formal assessment terms, yet we know

1 very little about the effect on language development at this stage of concentrating only on the visual-written mode;

2 very little about the interaction between reading and writing as it seems to be assumed by teachers of English that more reading, especially of 'good' literature, leads to 'better' writing; and

3 something about the level of correlation between oral and written performance for the same individuals given that Carter (1962), working with anaesthesiology students, found a correlation of +0.48 between oral and written performance and Davis (1973) working with high school students found a correlation of +0.47 between the two, both of which results suggest that written and oral measures

to a large extent provide performance measures of different aspects of the individual's competence.

In fact, at this stage of our knowledge of the later phases of language development, the only evidence that can reasonably be adduced must be anecdotal in nature.

At the earlier stages of language development, of course, there is more evidence available although the bulk of it is concentrated in the 1 - 3 and 3 - 5 age groups. It is surmised then that those preparing the curriculum statements surveyed here either did not feel justified in extrapolating from the evidence available or had decided that the existing evidence would be more confusing than helpful to teachers. Given the Bullock Report's (1975) recognition of teachers' lack of preparation in this general language area and the subsequent recommendation that all teachers should have a substantial course in language development, this is perhaps justifiable, at least in theory.

Almost without exception each state and each level offers some generalized statement of aims. The exceptions tend to be at the senior secondary level. As far as the primary and junior secondary levels are concerned many of the general aims reflect the language through experience emphasis of the rationales offered. Personal development, too, is also stressed as a central function of the teaching of English; for example one state wished to help students towards maturity and another indicated the importance of intellectual, emotional and social development.

In most states, with one notable exception, specific objectives were not delineated although some curriculum statements included listening in general terms under the heading Objectives. Consequently it is left generally to individual teachers to decide the specific objectives which will form the spearheads of their curricula. While this may ultimately be desirable it may also be that those who draft curriculum statements underestimate the difficulties inherent in any attempt to provide specific objectives.

Many of the curriculum statements outline areas of potential activity within the classroom, some even organizing these under identified skill areas. Some states provide advisory notes but for the most part the statements tend to be general rather than specific. Few states, again with the one exception, offer much guidance about the availability of resources.

Almost without exception the curriculum statements offer either no statement regarding evaluation or offer a set of generalized comments by way of a possible rationale for the teacher approaching his problems and responsibilities in the area of evaluation. With the exception of those states where public examinations remain at the senior secondary level, the trend seems to be towards continuous assessment. Little is stated regarding the desirable balance, if any, between assessment of oracy and of literacy.

In examining the balance in emphasis between the four areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing reflected in the curriculum statements, the estimate depends very much whether one focusses on what is reflected in the general aims statements or position statements about aims which are implicit in other sections of the documents surveyed. On the face of it most states accord equal weight to the four language areas and acknowledge that each is integral to the total pattern of language development. Yet other indications are that this implied pattern may not always be consistent with practice. Obviously at the senior secondary level assessment is based still largely on reading and writing and there is sufficient evidence to suggest that this is still so for earlier levels of schooling.

SECTION B

# IDENTIFYING THE DIMENSIONS OF ORACY

BY S. F. BOURKE AND F. HOLZER

## CHAPTER THREE

## TEACHER OPINION AND PRACTICE

### Introduction

In Section A of this report Clark and Davis summarised the literature on the nature and significance of oracy, and reported curriculum and other statements related to oral language development in Australian schools. In reporting a lack of curriculum emphasis on oracy, they found that curriculum statements, though generally acknowledging the importance of oracy skills, did not differentiate between providing 'fairly random opportunities for students to exercise oral skills and specifically designing spoken English activities to develop the skills of communication'. Clark and Davis went on to refer to what they saw as a failure to attempt a mapping of performances in listening and speaking as 'a major breakdown in education'.

Given this situation, it was considered desirable to determine what teachers thought to be important and to look at what these teachers were doing in the development of oracy abilities by students. To obtain this information, both primary and secondary teachers were interviewed and also asked to complete a questionnaire. A summary of the information obtained in the course of the teacher interviews is reported in this chapter, and the results of the questionnaire are summarised in Chapter Four. It was also considered necessary to propose a model for assessing listening and speaking abilities that students might develop. The model and its dimensions are also described in Chapter Four. The work reported in this Section constituted a feasibility study and subsequently a preparation for the assessment of oracy reported in Section C.

### Description of the Interview Method Used

As it was not feasible to conduct the very time-consuming classroom observations which would be necessary to obtain this information at first hand, interviews in which teachers reported their practices were used to obtain details of and comments upon teacher practices in developing students' listening and speaking skills. In this way the questionnaire information obtained by Duff and Clark (1976) and summarised in Section A of this report was supplemented by means of quite specific questions on teacher opinion and practice.

A structured interview schedule was devised, trialled, amended and used for the interviews with classroom teachers at both primary and secondary schools. A copy of the interview schedule is shown in Appendix Two. Where possible a tape recorder was used to supplement notes made on the schedule by interviewers. The interview began with some general questions on the school's English program and the place of oracy in that program, through questions on the importance of listening and speaking skills and methods used, to questions related to the assessment of listening and speaking. Before the interview, teachers were aware only that they were going to take part in an interview concerned with oracy, that is, listening and speaking abilities of students.

The group interview method was used to obtain teachers' views of the place of oracy in the curriculum, of their practices in this area, and of the importance of the speaking and listening tasks identified. Group rather than individual interviews were used for two major reasons:

1 Informal pilot interviews with individual teachers had indicated that, in general, teachers had not thought very much about the place of oracy in the curriculum or about specific practices that they used or could use in their teaching. However once one teacher in the group situation suggested an answer to a question in the interview, the other teachers were able to go on from that point and communicate their own views and practices.

2 It was less time-consuming to interview four or five teachers in this situation.

Although it had not been planned for, the group interview situation seemed to make it easier for teachers to respond frankly to questions even when their responses might not show them in a particularly favourable light. Apart from the presence of other teachers being a possible impediment to flights of fancy by an individual teacher, the supportive group of their fellow teachers in the presence of an unfamiliar interviewer seemed to greatly facilitate the giving of information by the teachers. It is well known that interviewees normally desire to please the interviewer by responding in the way they think he or she would like. However in answering Question 2, teachers were clearly not greatly influenced by this desire. Very few mentioned oracy as a major area in their program, although they all knew that oracy was the subject of the interview.

Teachers were interviewed at 12 primary and 7 secondary schools in four States only. There was also an attempt to include one primary and one secondary school in each of the four States where a particular emphasis was placed on oracy. These schools are referred to as 'paragon' schools when the results of the interviews are reported in this chapter. No attempt was made to randomise the sample of teachers or of schools. Consequently only an indication of the range of teachers' views on oracy was possible in the feasibility study.

## Summaries of Teacher Opinion and Practice

### Primary Teachers

It was not always possible to identify paragon primary schools in the time available. Where such schools were identified, the teachers interviewed did not differ in their responses from teachers at other primary schools. Consequently no reference is made to paragon schools in this section.

The primary teachers interviewed were classroom teachers with classes from Year 3 to Year 6 inclusive. Each of the items from the interview schedule is now taken and the answers given by teachers are summarised.

1 What is the source of the English curriculum you teach?

There was a high degree of consistency in replies to this question with no discernable differences in replies from teachers in different states. In general, teachers considered that they devised their own curriculum either individually or in small groups of teachers at the same school. Further information on the sources of curricula used is presented in Chapter Six where responses from a more representative sample of primary schools are reported.

The teachers further stated that they based their ideas on a variety of sources. Most frequently mentioned were the following:

* Education Department statements, curriculum guidelines or courses of study. In some cases this was by far the main source of ideas.
* Commercially-available texts and other materials.
* Their own individual assessment of the needs of students.

In one case a particularly active Principal was given as the major source of ideas and practices adopted in the English program of the school.

2. What are the major areas in the English program you teach?

There was less consistency in answers to this question with a dichotomy between teachers who taught an integrated program without identifying areas within the program and teachers who did identify areas even though they may have taught an integrated program. Many teachers in the former group consistently used a thematic approach in their teaching whereas those in the latter group tended to use this approach less frequently.

When teachers did mention specific areas in response to this question, oracy (or speaking or listening separately) was very infrequently given. This is particularly interesting because the interviewees knew that 'oracy' was the subject of the interview, yet it did not feature as an area in the descriptions of their English programs given by teachers.

3. What importance should be placed on oracy in the curriculum?

As might be expected in the interview situation (answers to the previous question notwithstanding), all teachers saw oracy as important in the school curriculum. On balance, the majority of teachers interviewed thought that oracy was important in itself although almost half the teachers saw oracy largely as a means, basis or foundation of literacy to come.

There was a tendency for teachers to consider oracy as more important than literacy, at least in the primary school. Others stated that oracy was more important in the infants and lower primary years whereas literacy was of increasing importance thereafter. However, the view was also expressed that literacy was always more important in the school situation even though oracy may be of greater importance outside the school. As one teacher said:

> They (oracy and literacy) are hard to separate, but what I rate important as the end product from primary school and possibly up till the time they leave secondary (school) is probably literacy development, that is in the schooling situation.

Teachers holding this view saw oracy in the school as a means to assisting further learning.

In summary, most of the primary teachers interviewed considered that the development of oracy abilities was at least as important as literacy even though it was not the responsibility solely of the English program. This question was also pursued with the larger sample of primary schools and is reported in Chapter Six.

Most teachers thought that listening and speaking abilities were equally important. However, a significant minority view was that listening abilities were more important because 'listening precedes speaking and is particularly necessary for further learning in the classroom situation'.

4. Could you give one particular reason why oracy is important?

Almost all teachers considered that social communication was the major reason for the importance of oracy development and, in this, functioning as a citizen and 'develop as people' were included. This answer was given by some interviewees who had responded to Question 3 that oracy was largely a means to literacy in the school situation. It seems that these teachers were making a distinction between the importance of oracy abilities generally and their importance within the school curriculum.

A few teachers agreed that the major reason for the importance of oracy development was 'to aid further learning at school'. These were also the teachers who had responded that oracy was not important in itself in answer to Question 3.

5. Is oracy development equally important for all students?

The general view of teachers was that oracy development was equally important for all students although some students would require much more help than others in achieving the development desired. In particular, shy, migrant and other socially disadvantaged students were identified as needing more help than some other students. Some students were competent and confident in the oracy area, apparently naturally, and assistance was unnecessary. However, continued oracy development was considered to be no less important for these students.

The minority view was also expressed that weaker students who may never become fully literate should receive every assistance in developing their oracy abilities because this could be the only avenue of communication available to them. In that case oracy development was seen as more important for them than it was for other students. This view reflects the emphasis placed on social communication as the major reason for the importance of oracy in answer to Question 4.

6 Are there ages of students where oracy development is more or less important?

Although oracy development was considered to be equally important at

all ages in the primary school, the teachers generally thought that more emphasis could and should be placed on oracy development in the infants and early primary years. Students were less self-conscious at these ages and therefore found less difficulty in using oral methods in the classroom.

7. Are there some listening and speaking abilities which you feel are more important for schools to develop in students? If so, which abilities are more important?

A number of groups of teachers interviewed were able to recall long lists of abilities developed in their school programs. To a large extent these lists anticipated a later section of the interview in which the interviewees were to be presented with lists of tasks or competencies which might be included in a school's oral language development program. The list produced by adding the contribution of every teacher is now given.

* Recognizing sounds that belong to a particular object.
* Isolating single sounds.
* Developing memory.
* Developing concentration.
* Developing auditory closure, that is the ability to block out interference and distractions and to concentrate on what is important.
* Interpreting non-verbal communication and visual cues, such as hand and facial movements.
* Developing listening attitudes by helping children become aware of the importance of listening as part of a two-way communication process.
* Listening selectively.
* Listening to stories then (i) retelling the story,
  (ii) answering formal and informal questions,
  (iii) getting the sequencing correct, or
  (iv) comprehending specific details.
* Developing a language of listening, that is, a vocabulary to describe what is heard. (e.g. classifying sounds as ugly, harsh, pleasant, soft, loud, etc.)
* Developing an effective use of intonation when speaking.
* Organizing thoughts before expressing them so that what is said is relevant and clearly expressed.
* Comprehending spoken language.

* Speaking fluently and confidently to the class.
* Speaking expressively, clearly and in an entertaining fashion.
* Using formal language.
* Using informal language.
* Expressing an idea.
* Reviewing a book orally.
* Repeating a set of instructions.
* Carrying out a set of instructions.
* Taking messages.
* Reporting an event.
* Reading aloud set texts or own compositions.
* Participating in class discussion.
* Arguing logically in a discussion.
* Gathering information.
* Orally presentating a research project to class and then answering questions asked of student by classmates.
* Debating.
* Thinking critically such as the discrimination of media and other influences.
* Making decisions and choices discriminatively.
* Making judgements concerning what is heard.
* Discerning persuasive techniques.

More generally, it seemed that most teachers had not given detailed consideration to oracy development of students and mentioned only a few specific abilities, frequently after some thought. Abilities often mentioned were oral comprehension, formal and informal speaking and discussion.

8. To what extent is it possible to develop students' listening and speaking abilities in the normal school situation?

All interviewees agreed that it was possible to develop oracy abilities to some extent in the classroom situation. Most teachers saw formidable difficulties and restrictions in the personal, physical and curriculum demands made in implementing an oracy development program, and varied in the extent to which they thought the difficulties could be overcome.

Difficulties and restrictions most frequently mentioned were:

* Class size. It was considered difficult to obtain a meaningful contribution from many students in the course of a lesson.

* Time required. A balance was needed between the very time-consuming nature of oral language work and other important aspects of the school program.
* The individual nature of oral language work. Class management becomes a problem.
* The physical layout of classrooms. A need for withdrawal areas was stressed.
* Noise level. A higher level of noise is necessary in oracy lessons. Although carpet in the building would help, the noice level can present problems for people in adjoining classrooms or offices.
* Knowing what to do. Many teachers feel they have little knowledge in this area and that insufficient guidance is available.
* There is nothing concrete to show as a result of an oracy development program. Some teachers clearly felt a need to have completed projects or written work in books to show to parents, principals and school inspectors. The following statement by one teacher amply illustrates this point.

> Another thing that cripples the effort we put into listening skills is a fear that has been inbred in teachers over a number of years of having some recorded proof of what you've done. If the principal walks in you can show what you've done today in maths, what you've done in spelling, what you've done in writing, it's all there. You can't put anything down that proves the child has listened and obeyed the instructions, and I think teachers are a little wary of this. If you've been in a classroom for forty minutes and the inspector walks in and wants to see what you've been doing there's just nothing, there's nothing there, you haven't a pencil on the desk or a piece of paper but the kiddies could actually be achieving very good work...

9. <u>As most communication is oral, not written, do you think that enough time is spent in schools on developing students' listening and speaking abilities?</u>

A majority of teachers thought that enough time was spent on oracy development, with most stressing that much more time was now spent in this way than ever before. These interviewees considered the appropriate balance had been reached.

A large minority thought that more time should be spent on oracy development because of its importance for students. However, they saw practical problems relating to balance in the curriculum and the 'easier' classroom management situation involved in reading and writing as limitations on increasing time on oral language development. Some teachers referred to the relatively large amount of time committed to oracy in an incidental way during other lessons as something of a substitute for what they saw as insufficient time specifically on oral language development.

Only one teacher who had stated that the real concern of the school was with literacy, not oracy, thought that too much time was spent on oracy development.

10. Is there anything which you plan specifically to assist the listening and speaking development of your students?

In each case the interviewees eventually gave a long list of what they do specifically to assist listening and speaking development. Although there was often an initial delay while teachers thought about this question, once one teacher started to give examples, others rapidly followed. This was another indication that the teachers had not given much specific thought to oracy. The only activity which was mentioned as being done by every school except one was 'News'. This school had substituted prepared talks for news. The first ten activities mentioned are listed below in descending order of frequency. No order is implied within the other two categories.

Most Often Mentioned

(1) News or morning talks.
(2) Reading aloud a set text.
(3) Drama and plays.
(4) Informal debates.
(5) Prepared talks.
(6) Answering questions orally.
(7) Giving a report.
(8) Comprehension of spoken material.
(9) Discussions.
(10) Listening and speaking using a tape recorder.

Mentioned More than Once

* Extracting the main points from a spoken extract.
* Tongue twisters.
* Asking questions.
* Presenting individual assignments orally.
* Retelling a story.
* Book reviews.
* Conducting assemblies.
* Describing an object orally.

Mentioned Once Only

* Emphasizing importance of listening.
* Listening with eyes closed so that only ears function.
* Listening games. e.g. carrying out instructions, drawing a diagram from oral instructions.
* Listening to a story for pleasure.
* Listening for a specific point.
* Listening post activities.
* Listening to a spoken extract, then either writing it down, retelling it orally, or summarizing it.
* Writing down the main points after listening to a story.
* Writing down notes from a talk.
* Writing answers to spoken questions.
* Listening and speaking games.
* SRA reading skill builder (including a listening skills program).
* Memory games e.g. 'I went to the shop and bought ....', Pass the message.
* Remembering sequences of numbers and writing them down.
* Auditory development.
* Dictation of words, groups of letters, or numbers.
* Reading aloud - own stories and work.
  - poetry.
  - mathematical facts.
  - someone else's work.
* Individual, group, or class repetition of verses.
* Recitation.
* Poetry, verse speaking.
* Nursery rhymes.
* Speech exercises and drills such as breathing.
* Correction of speech while children are talking.

* Appreciating the beauty of oral language.
* Word patterns.
* Prepared talks.
* Impromptu talks.
* Talks prompted by picture-stimulus material.
* Answering questions after giving a talk.
* Questioning a speaker.
* How to ask a question.
* How to reply to a question.
* Group work.
* Oral presentation of group projects.
* Interviews.
* Distinguishing recorded commercials.
* Analysing spoken advertisements.
* Preparing stories from newspaper articles.
* Open-ended stories.
* Compering shows.
* Concerts.

There was considerable variation in time spent in this way with higher grades spending less time than lower grades in the primary school. The average times given varied from one hour per week to the equivalent of one full day per week. The majority tended to identify approximately three to four hours per week as being spent specifically on oracy development. It was interesting to note that even where teachers stated that only one hour per week was spent in this way, they still gave a fairly long list of activities which they said they planned.

11. Are there ways in which your students' listening and speaking development is assisted incidentally?

As was the case in the previous section, many teachers commented on the difficulty of separating specific from incidental activities in the oracy area. As might be expected there was a strong consensus that incidental development of oracy abilities can and does take place almost all the time throughout the school day. In particular, question and answer sessions, discussions, listening to instructions and student-run assemblies were frequently mentioned as learning situations where opportunities for incidental oracy development existed. The extent to which these opportunities were grasped was not probed.

12. Where did you get the method(s) used?

The majority of teachers stated they developed the methods themselves, either in consultation with other staff at the same school or as an individual effort. Other sources given were: recall of own schooling, pre-service teacher education courses, in-service workshops, reading and commercially-available materials.

13. Do you currently assess your students' listening and speaking abilities?

The majority of teachers initially stated that they do not 'assess' their students in the oracy area but that they 'evaluate' their performance 'subjectively' or 'informally'. It was clear that these teachers equated 'assessment' with formal testing and mark summing, usually for the purposes of making comparisons between students. In general, most teachers re-considered their initial response and answered that they did assess informally but in many cases they do not write anything down as a result of their assessment. Other teachers frequently wrote down a comment in a record book or a report card and monitored a student's progress through the year. A small number of teachers used commercially-available listening tests but none used a speaking test. One teacher described in detail that she first assesses informally and then assesses specific speaking abilities such as speed, accuracy, vocabulary, expression and tone.

Of the two schools where teachers did not want to assess oracy development, one school does evaluate informally in this area but the teachers did not consider this as assessment. Teachers at one of the primary schools which was selected because it had a particular emphasis on oracy answered in this way and were concerned about the 'artificial' nature of an assessment situation.

The major reasons why teachers did not assess more thoroughly in this area were given as the time necessary for individual assessment, the difficulty of the task, the lack of availability of appropriate tests (or lack of awareness of what tests were available) and, more generally, not knowing what to do.

> ...I wouldn't know how to test...orally.
> I would (test)...if I knew what to do.

14. The questionnaire was completed at this point.

Teachers were then shown lists of listening and speaking tasks and were asked to state whether they thought each of the tasks were essential, important, unimportant or undesirable as parts of a school program. The information obtained from this questionnaire has been summarized in Chapter Four, and the questionnaire has been reproduced in Appendix Three.

15. How would you feel about assessing the tasks you have classified as essential or important (in the questionnaire):

(a) If you were assessing your own students?

A majority of teachers was concerned about the difficulty of the task but would like to be in a position to assess their students on these tasks. These teachers would welcome help in such an assessment by means of advice and appropriate material to use. A minority of the teachers thought that a more subjective evaluation was all that could be done and that this was adequate for their purposes.

(b) If someone else assessed your students for the purposes of curriculum evaluation?

Again the majority thought that this would be useful as long as it was well done. It was strongly expressed that teachers should be given specific results and guidelines for each student tested to maximise the effectiveness of such an assessment program. A minority of teachers, mainly from one State, saw problems in an 'outsider' assessing their students. The problems related to how well it was done, lack of trust of outsiders and what was seen as a probable lack of follow-up which could benefit students.

16. What do you think might be the good and bad effects (if any) of assessing the tasks:

(a) On students?

Most teachers saw no bad effects on students as a result of assessing the tasks. The bad effects that were suggested related to stress on students and the possible use of outsiders in an assessment. The good effects mentioned were related to the information which would become available so long as there was a follow-up of the assessment. One group of teachers considered that any effect on students would be good if the assessment was based on tasks not on competition between students. In essence, this group was drawing an implicit distinction between criterion-referenced and norm-referenced testing.

(b) On your teaching?

Most teachers thought that an assessment of this type would be useful for their teaching. They considered it would help by giving direction to their teaching, making them think about their practices and providing useful information on each student's abilities. Detrimental effects mentioned were a possible imbalance which could

develop in the teacher's overall oracy program by concentrating on assessing a wide range of specific tasks, and the danger that an emphasis on oracy assessment could encourage teachers to redeploy a disproportionate amount of effort from other activities such as reading and writing.

(c) On the curriculum?

The main benefits mentioned were that more effective use could be made of the time presently allocated to oracy in the curriculum if specific tasks were used as guidelines and yardsticks, and that oracy would probably be allowed more time in a school day as is commensurate with its importance. Interestingly, the teachers who had answered Question 15 by stating that assessment was difficult when attempted by the teacher and probably should not be done by someone else, responded here that assessing the tasks would show up shortcomings in the curriculum and enable corrective action to be taken. Two penalties of assessing tasks were identified: the time taken would be considerable and there was a danger that too much emphasis would be placed on the technicalities of listening and speaking.

17. Do you think that taking part in this interview/questionnaire session has altered any of your views on the place of listening and speaking skills in the curriculum?

All teachers responded favourably to this question, perhaps partly out of politeness. However, they did state some specific ways in which they had been influenced. These were:

* they had been made more aware of the importance of oracy development and of possibilities for work in the area.
* their interest had been aroused in improving their teaching.
* the group discussion which formed the basis of the interview had been stimulating in that they had been challenged to think about what they now do.
* the Statement of Listening and Speaking Objectives would be useful in its present form even though there was no detailed guidance as to how to proceed.
* the interview clarified in their own minds what they do in developing oracy skills.

A few teachers suggested that their current practice would be changed as a result of the interview - some considered that a change would probably be short term only while others implied a long term change in what they do could well be a result of the interview.

Secondary Teachers

Of the paragon schools identified, only one stood out from the other schools as different in its oracy practices. Teachers at this school responded differently from other teachers on a number of questions in the interview. For these questions, the responses of teachers at the paragon school are reported separately. (See Chapter Six for a more representative view of secondary teachers.)

The secondary teachers interviewed were classroom teachers who taught at least some English lessons to students in Year 7 to 10 inclusive. The answers given by teachers to each of the interview questions are now summarised.

1. What is the source of the English curriculum you teach?

The major source of the English curriculum taught at almost every secondary school was stated to be education department guidelines to which staff, either individually or collectively, made minor changes as they saw appropriate. However, teachers at one school stated that there was insufficient guidance available for them to plan their own curriculum effectively, so they were forced to do the best they could while recognizing that their best was not good enough.

At the paragon school, staff of the Speech and Drama Department taught listening and speaking as part of an oral communication course which was not mounted by the English Department. They had devised their own oracy courses which were based on procedures they had developed themselves, and not based on texts or other commercially-available material.

2. What are the major areas in the English program you teach?

Most groups of teachers were able to give divisions of the English program taught. Compared with the primary schools, there was much less emphasis on the thematic approach although it was mentioned at one school. Areas of the program identified were:

* Reading
* Writing (expression and some creative writing)
* Drama
* Literature
* Poetry

Only one teacher identified speaking and listening as a specific area in the curriculum.

This question had no relevance for teachers at the paragon school who were not concerned with the English program in general.

3. What importance should be placed on oracy in the curriculum?

As was the case with the primary teachers, the secondary teachers also saw oracy as an important element in the curriculum. However, the consensus in this case was that the major reason for the importance of oracy was the assistance that oral language development gave to the attainment of literacy.

> Success in our school is based on your success to write. Unfortunately we don't place enough prominence on speaking and listening skills.

However, the group view at one school was that oracy was important because students enjoyed listening and speaking more than they enjoyed reading and writing.

The secondary teachers had some difficulty in comparing the importance or oracy and literacy abilities, perhaps because they had given little thought to oracy development in their curricula (see Question 2). Responses were mixed but tended to favour literacy, at least implicitly. (Chapter Six reports the views of a larger sample of secondary teachers.)

In general, the teachers were also unable to distinguish between the importance of listening and speaking abilities. However, there was a fairly consistent view that effective listening was more difficult for students than effective speaking.

Teachers at the paragon school responded that oracy was at least as important as literacy because oracy skills are used far more than literacy after the student leaves school. They agreed with the other teachers that listening skills were more difficult for students to develop, and added that listening perhaps required more emphasis as a result.

4. Could you give one particular reason why oracy is important?

The majority of secondary teachers interviewed gave social communication or 'relating to people' as the basis of the importance of oracy. This answer should be contrasted with answers to the previous question when most teachers stated that oracy was important because of the assistance it gave to literacy development. However, a minority of teachers also stressed the importance of listening and speaking skills for learning at school.

Teachers at the paragon school also stressed social communication over learning as the major reason for the importance of oracy. As one teacher who argued for the social importance of oracy expressed it:

> We would all claim that a good ability in this (oracy) field would aid rather than deter intellectual progress in school. But we don't do it specifically for the intellectual progress... .

5. Is oracy development equally important for all students?

Again as for the primary teachers, the majority opinion of the secondary teachers was that oracy development was equally important for all students. However, some students would need more help than others to achieve some competence in oracy.

A significant minority view was that oracy development was more important for the lowest ability group of students. This group would be unlikely to become fully literate and it was considered important that the sense of achievement these students could attain by oracy development would be beneficial for them.

No consensus was achieved by teachers at the paragon school in answer to this question. Whereas it was accepted that students of lower ability would be unlikely to gain as much as some students, the idea that oracy development can compensate for other learning problems was expressed.

> I think we spend an awful lot of time trying to teach the literacy skills when perhaps that time could be better spent in the oracy field.

6. Are there ages of students where oracy development is more or less important?

Teachers at all secondary schools (including the paragon school) agreed that the development of oracy skills was more important at younger age levels, particularly in the primary school. This answer emphasised the implication by teachers that most students should have attained adequate oracy skills prior to commencing secondary schooling. The secondary teachers felt that they did not have the same opportunities to help students develop these skills. This implication lay behind answers to a number of questions asked during the interviews with secondary teachers.

7. Are there some listening and speaking abilities which you feel are more important for schools to develop in students? If so, which abilities are more important?

In general the secondary teachers had more difficulty in recalling important abilities than the primary teachers had experienced. Group discussion and reading aloud were the most frequently mentioned abilities.

The complete list of all abilities rated as important is given below:

* Reading aloud
* Group discussion
* - group research work
  - organizing a group
  - leading a discussion
* Getting ideas and feelings across to others
* Thinking before speaking
* Discriminative thinking
* Comprehension including comprehending information
* Teaching a lesson
* Speaking to class as a whole
* Listening to long talks
* Listening to one another
* Asking questions
* Answering questions
* Following directions
* Job interviews and other situations
* Developing poise in an interview situation
* Organizing a letter orally before writing it
* Social skills
* Drama activities.

Teachers at the paragon school also provided, in addition to the abilities already listed, a number of abilities specifically related to the world of commerce including use of the telephone, formal introductions and dictation of letters.

8. To what extent is it possible to develop students' listening and speaking abilities in the normal school situation?

As for the primary interviews, all groups agreed it was possible to develop oracy abilities in schools with the extent varying with the type of class and the teacher's relationship with the class.

Difficulties and restrictions most frequently mentioned were:

* Class size. This was the most frequently given restriction.
* Pressure from senior school staff to have a quiet classroom.
* Time necessary to plan and carry out an oracy lesson.
* Peer group influence not to do well in front of the group.
* Need to respect the right to privacy of the student.
* Difficulty in knowing how to go about it.

> Most teachers are completely at sea as to how oral work could be presented in class or...what was to be included.

Teachers at the paragon school found it was useful to be a separate department. This gave them the freedom to make it possible to do a great deal in developing oracy abilities. Difficulties which they experienced were related to the status of the department which was seen as 'a luxury' by some other staff and consequently by some students.

9. As most communication is oral, not written, do you think that enough time is spent in schools on developing students' listening and speaking abilities?

Most groups failed to reach consensus in answering this question. Those who argued that not enough time was spent on oracy development, frequently added that '... (you) can always spend more time on most things.

Teachers also referred to opportunities in other subject areas ('language across the curriculum') for oracy development.

The teachers at the paragon school who taught only oracy considered that not nearly enough time was spent in this way. These teachers suggested that approximately five times the time now spent was desirable for oracy development, giving every student five 40 minute periods per week specifically in this area.

10. Is there anything which you plan specifically to assist the listening and speaking development of your students?

Group work planned to include discussion and other oral language activities, such as an oral report of results of group work, was by far the most frequently-mentioned activity specifically designed to develop students oracy skills. Various types of activities associated with interviews and the use of audio and video equipment were also mentioned a number of times. The complete list of activities mentioned is given below.

Most frequently mentioned activities

* Group work including discussion and research.
* Interviews including being interviewed for a job.
* Use of equipment e.g. tape recorder, film and video.

Activities mentioned more than once

* Reading aloud e.g. poetry.
* Listening to a passage and answering questions.

* Role playing.
* Students teaching a lesson.
* Debating.
* Drama.

Activities mentioned once only

* Orally presenting book reports.
* Presenting ideas to rest of class.
* Playing with nonsense words.
* Two-way dialogues between two students.
* Speaking in situations requiring tact.
* Answering a phone.
* Giving directions.

In general, teachers were not able to estimate the time spent per week on these activities. Teachers at one school did not contribute to the above list of specifically-planned activities because they reported that only incidental oral language learning took place at their school.

Every student at the paragon school had one 40-minute period per week taught by a member of the oral language staff in addition to normal English lessons. These students also had the option of spending five to thirteen periods in this way in Years 11 and 12.

11. Are there ways in which your students' listening and speaking development is assisted incidentally?

Incidental development of oracy abilities was stated to take place throughout the school day in question and answer situations, and in the continual interaction between teacher and student and between students. A number of groups of teachers suggested that full advantage was not taken of incidental situations where oral language development could be assisted because of a lack of awareness by teachers of the possibilities presented.

> I suspect I am not aware of it (oracy) enough. This (the interview) has made me think about it more than I would normally...

12. Where did you get the method(s) used?

Teachers at all schools stated they had developed the methods themselves, either from discussions with other members of the school staff, as a result of conferences, at in-service courses or from books.

13. Do you currently assess your students' listening and speaking abilities?

Approximately half the teachers interviewed stated that they assess students' oracy abilities informally. The assessments made by these teachers were entirely subjective and no marks were awarded or recorded as a result of the assessments. In some cases the teachers recorded a comment for future reference. The other half of the teachers also assessed oracy abilities but did it more formally and recorded marks for students. Although these teachers accepted that there was a large element of subjectivity in their assessments, they tended to have some criteria against which they felt they could award marks. They stressed that the mark a student received was not based on this performance compared with the rest of the class but on his performance against pre-determined criteria. Criteria used at one school included:

* Presentation
* Whether a message was conveyed
* Continuity
* Word usage
* Whether comments were constructive.

Teachers at one school stated that they give marks for listening and speaking in part because some students 'won't do a thing without a mark at the other end.' Other teachers, who did little in assessment, suggested the reason was that they felt inadequate to deal with a spoken language program and its assessment. One teacher at another school simply stated that she does not assess at all in this area because she does not know how to.

Teachers at the paragon school assess formally where possible and informally otherwise. Some of the criteria used in formal assessments of speaking abilities are audibility, intelligibility, ideas, presentation, structure and effort.

14. The questionnaire was completed at this point.

The teachers were asked whether they thought that specified listening and speaking tasks were essential, important, unimportant or undesirable as elements of a school program. The results of this section of the interview are summarized in Chapter Four and the questionnaire has been reproduced in Appendix Three.

15. How would you feel about assessing the tasks you have classified as essential or important (in the questionnaire):

(a) If you were assessing your own students?

In general, teachers responded that assessment of the tasks they had identified as essential or important would enable them to assist students to improve their oracy abilities. However, this positive response was tempered by concern that they would need help in the implementation of such assessments if they were to be well done. The teachers were also concerned about the subjectivity and reliability of assessments in the oracy area and about the time needed to make individual student assessments. A number of teachers again stressed the importance of assessing students only against the tasks, and not against each other in a competitive situation.

A few individual teachers felt that students should not be assessed in this way and that a more general comment on performance was all that is desirable or necessary. As indicated in the following comment, some teachers are not aware that assessment does not necessarily lead to competition through grading.

> (You) shouldn't test and grade such skills. Teachers should not be there to put the child down, but to help them .

(b) If someone else assessed your students for the purposes of curriculum evaluation?

In general, the teachers would approve of such activity only if it were a co-operative effort with teachers having the purpose of helping the individual students involved, and only if it were well done with well thought out objectives and procedures. Some concern was again expressed that such an assessment should not result in an 'oracy age' used to establish norms.

Teachers interviewed at one school considered that assessment by an outsider would be too formal and that the tasks identified in the questionnaire were too limited in any case. This group thought that teachers should be doing other things which they found to be more agreeable.

> It is not pleasant for a teacher to have to assess and listen to a child when he is talking to him. (He) should give all of himself to the child.

Teachers at the paragon school supported assessment of the tasks they had identified as essential or important assuming it was well done.

16. What do you think might be the good and bad effects (if any) of assessing the tasks:

(a) On students?

The respondents split into two groups in answering this question. One group suggested that assessing the tasks identified would have adverse effects on students. It was stated that such assessment would be 'one more hassle' which would upset students to some extent. The other group suggested that a non-competitive assessment could become an incentive for students to improve in the oracy area. This second group felt it was a matter of how well the assessment was planned and executed.

(b) On your teaching?

Reaction to this question was most interesting in comparison with the previous question relating to the effects on students of assessing oracy tasks. Many teachers who had responded that the effects on students were likely to be harmful, suggested that such an assessment could have beneficial effects on their teaching because it would provide them with useful information on the strengths and weaknesses of their students. Conversely, some of the teachers who had stated that an assessment of tasks could be an incentive for students, felt it may have a detrimental effect on their teaching because of time constraints and because the assessment of specific tasks was 'too structured'.

(c) On the curriculum?

In general, there was some concern expressed that task assessment could lead to a too-structured curriculum. Time was also considered to be a problem. However, the suggestion was also made that such an assessment would make teachers re-think what they are doing and why they are doing it. This could have only beneficial effects.

17. Do you think that taking part in this interview/questionnaire session has altered any of your views on the place of listening and speaking skills in the curriculum?

The majority of teachers interviewed stated that the experience had made them more aware of what the issues were in an important area of their teaching. Other teachers suggested that the session had provided a

reinforcement of what they do. The group of teachers at one school where little thought had been given to oracy abilities previously, stated that the interview had helped them to identify and clarify issues and therefore would have a marked effect on what they did in their English programs.

> This (interview)...has brought out a whole lot of ideas that you've forgotten when you get on with the everyday task of getting on and keeping the kids in line; and you sometimes forget to what purposes you are doing things and when you have it all outlined like this, it suddenly pinpoints it and clarifies it.

The staff of the English department at this school is currently re-thinking and planning a new English program. One stimulus for this interest was the oracy interview.

Teachers at the paragon school were interested in the interview session but felt that regular meetings were essential if there was to be any effect on teaching practices.

## Relevance of Teachers' Views for the Assessment of Oracy

The group interview method used was successful not only because of the reasons already expressed, but also because there was a considerable degree of consistency within a school on teachers' views and practices with respect to oracy development. In most cases a 'school view' did tend to emerge. The degree to which a school policy or guidelines for an oracy curriculum existed was followed up during testing and is reported in Chapter Six.

Teachers were concerned about the assessment of oracy abilities and almost all pointed out and emphasised the difficulty of making assessments and, where they were made, of the subjectivity of their assessments. Most of the primary teachers and about one half of the secondary teachers would have liked some help in making assessments of students in this area. The remaining secondary teachers either felt that more formal and reliable assessment was not possible or not wanted in the oracy area. There was a tendency for secondary teachers to think that the oracy abilities of students should, to a large extent, have been developed in the primary school and therefore were of lesser concern to them at the secondary level, at least as far as their teaching program was concerned. It was considered to be a useful activity to provide interested teachers with assistance in assessing the oral language development of their students.

Although most teachers seemed to have given little detailed thought to the development of listening and speaking abilities, many classroom

programs and activities had oracy components built in. Teachers at primary schools were able to identify greater ranges of abilities related to the development of oracy than were teachers at secondary schools. In general, teachers considered the development of listening and speaking abilities listed by the researchers to be important. If the abilities listed had not been consistent with classroom practices or at least with what the teachers thought were appropriate abilities to develop, there would have been little point in proceeding to the assessment stage of this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

# TOWARDS A MODEL FOR ORACY ASSESSMENT

## The Assessment Model

Much of the oracy curriculum described in Section A and the classroom oral language development work reported in Chapter Three were task oriented. The intention of the curriculum statements and teacher practices described was that students should be able to do certain things. Frequently the tasks were closely related to the development of skills or abilities in different contexts. Consequently an assessment model that is related to classroom practice probably should emphasise the measurement of tasks closely related to student abilities, although other aspects of oral language use such as context and purpose should not be ignored.

Lists of listening and speaking tasks were developed by means of a purposefully uncritical gathering of all tasks or competencies that one or more authors, researchers or teachers had thought to be important in the oracy area. The tasks were then classified on a three-dimensional framework, the dimensions of which were the ability of the listener or speaker, the context of the task and the purpose intended by the listener or speaker. The framework which has been developed to provide a meaningful classification of listening and speaking tasks was simply one of many approaches which could have been used. It is similar to the classification used by Allen and Brown (1976) but differs somewhat from the classifications of listening proposed by Crink and Buntley (1955) and Duff and Clark (1976), and a classification of speaking used by Tough (1976).

As stated above the tasks identified were classified according to the three separate dimensions of:

1 the listening or speaking ability required,
2 the context of the listening or speaking task, and
3 the purpose in listening or speaking.

Each of the three dimensions were used to classify the tasks and three separate categorizations of tasks could be formed in this way. Alternatively, the three dimensions may be combined to form a framework in which each task is allocated to a cell in the three dimensional lattice so formed. The latter procedure is useful in determining which are the important areas

and which areas may have been neglected in an oral language program. The ability dimension was seen as the key one in a program concerned with the development of listening and speaking skills by students. Consequently it has been used as the basis for classifying listening and speaking tasks and competencies.

The Ability Dimension

A range of listening and speaking abilities or skills at differing levels of language complexity are required for effective oral communication. Four categories of language have been identified as a means of grouping the abilities: oral vocabulary, literal meaning, implied meaning, and analytical and critical thinking. Obviously the categories overlap to some extent but, in general, each of the listening and speaking skills can with careful judgement be placed into one of the four language categories.

Oral Vocabulary. The skills which are considered appropriate at this level are concerned with identifying and supplying words, statements and their meanings, to provide the basis for comprehension and use of oral language. The required listening skills are concerned with the abilities to recognize and understand spoken words and the relationships between words. The speaking skills are related to the abilities to supply and pronounce appropriate words or simple statements in order to indicate a basic understanding of language, not for elocutionary purposes. Both the listening and speaking skills are closely related to word knowledge. Examples of skills identified as concerned with oral vocabulary were identifying and correcting inappropriate word usage.

Literal Meaning. The skills appropriate at this level are the comprehension and use of words and statements in different contexts where language is used for communicating information. The listening skills required involve comprehending of the literal meaning of what is heard in order to follow and understand a statement, explanation, description, instruction or other transactional language. The listener is also required to show some indication of content retention and a satisfactory short term auditory attention span. Listening to a continuous exposition involves a complexity of skills. Skills or abilities involved with literal meaning are not always easy to distinguish from those involved with implied meaning. Even in transactional discourse they involve not only an understanding of spoken words, because deriving the total meaning from a statement depends upon the style of narration, the attitudes of the speaker, the subtle meaning of the words

employed, clarity, voices and emphasis placed on different parts of statements. The distinction between literal and implied meaning made in this case is particularly one of relative emphasis and involves the use of judgement. The listener is also required to indicate that he can follow spoken instructions by performing in a defined manner.

The appropriate speaking skills are concerned with the ability to describe literally what is seen, heard or thought in a style that shows some form of progression and unity in the language used. Clarity of expression, sequencing of events, the relevance of information provided and the context of the speech are of prime importance. The speaker is also required to give explanations and instructions, the meaning of which also depend largely on clarity and sequencing.

Implied Meaning. The skills required here are the abilities to comprehend and use words and statements where speech has the purposes of identifying and expressing intentions, feelings, attitudes and emotions, and where the literal meaning of language assumes lesser importance. The listening skills involve the ability to comprehend the inferential or implied meaning of what is heard, to infer missing parts of a conversation from what is actually heard and to understand differences in meaning brought about by different emphases and gestures. A listener is required to be aware of the different levels of meaning and to make sophisticated connections between imagery and fact. He is expected to respond to context and tone and to infer meaning which goes beyond a literal understanding of what is heard. As stated above the classification of a skill as concerned with literal or with implied meaning frequently is a matter of emphasis and judgement.

The speaking skills are concerned with the ability to discover, explore, structure and express personal feelings, ideas and experience through the use of imagery. The inferential meaning of what is said is sometimes different from what is actually spoken because the speaker communicates feeling, emotion and atmosphere in addition to the literal meaning conveyed by the words used.

Analytical and Critical Thinking. The skills required here are the abilities to make and to express critical judgements concerning the logic, consistency, relevance and purpose of what is heard or spoken and the ability to participate logically, cogently and persuasively in discussions. The listener needs to exhibit the abilities to analyse and to reason in addition to making inferences about the meaning of speech. The appropriate

speaking skills also require that the speaker has the ability to express cogently and persuasively a view or opinion based on his critical judgement and to discuss his views logically. He is also required to summarize his own and others' ideas orally.

The Context Dimension

The form of listening stimulus material and spoken expression will vary according to the context in which it is presented. For listening, the situation in which the stimulus is presented, the speaker, and his purpose in speaking are likely to be external to the listener although this will depend on the degree to which the purpose is shared between the speaker and the listener. For speaking, the situation, the audience and the purpose in speaking, while not external to the speaker, provide the context of the oral communication. They provide different contexts for the listener or speaker which considerably influence the specific requirement and difficulty of his task. In general, the context dimension may be seen as forming a continuum between formal and informal requirements. It is considered likely that performance in the formal communication contexts could be facilitated by specifically-directed school programs whereas performance in the informal contexts are unlikely to be influenced directly by curriculum or classroom practices. This formal/informal classification of contexts is similar to the formal, semi-formal and intimate classification used by the Queensland Board of Secondary School Studies (1974:4 and 6).

Formal Context. Within this category a distinction may be made between communication which consists largely of a one-way process, either listening or speaking, and communication where the process is essentially two-way requiring both listening and speaking. The one-way process is represented by the following forms of communication:

| | |
|---|---|
| narrative and exposition | commentary |
| description | a report |
| a short talk | a lecture |
| a simple explanation | a recitation |
| instructions | reading aloud |
| directions | story telling |

The two-way process would include discussion, seminars, debate and interviews.

Informal Context. Most informal oral communication consists of a two-way process in which the roles of speaker and listener are exchanged rapidly and in which the bond between speaker and listener is particularly important for effective communication. Examples of informal oral communication are conversation, both casual and argumentative, some story telling and explanation which in different situations are formal communications, and use of language in unrelated words and sentences to express emotions.

The contexts for oral communication are essential components of the listening and speaking tasks and competencies listed in the next section. Both the formal and the informal contexts described here will be observed in the specific tasks and competencies categorised by the ability dimension.

The Purpose Dimension

The usage of oral communication which a listener intends and the purpose a person has in speaking should be considered as important in a program concerned with the development of listening and speaking skills. Five categories of purpose in listening and speaking - personal, recreational, classroom, business and citizenship - have been identified and are described below. The categories are similar to the four categories used by Hitchman (1966a:8) to describe the need for verbal communication personally, socially, economically and nationally.

Personal. This category is typical of the home and peer group and is perhaps the least able to be influenced by school programs concerned with the development of listening and speaking skills. The context here is likely to be informal and full meaning of the communication is gained only because the speaker and listener are well known to each other.

Recreational. This category refers to any oral communication activity which is participated in for pleasure during leisure time. The context may be formal, such as listening to or participating in drama or other oral presentations, or informal such as participating in general conversation and discussion groups.

Classroom. This category refers to any oral communication participated in during normal class time for the purpose of learning. The context would normally be formal with an emphasis on content and exchange of information. The level of listening and speaking skills required in this situation would be such as to permit the student to become an independent learner in the classroom.

Business. This purpose in listening or speaking is typical of the commercial and industrial world. The oral communication able to be received or given would tend to be formal and would need to be sufficient for employment and for everyday business transactions if a person were to be independent of others for financial support and everyday living.

Citizenship. This purpose is connected with government and other large and small service and community organizations. The context would tend to be formal and the oral communications would be those which, in addition to those required for business purposes, make it possible for a person to partake fully as an aware and responsible citizen in Australian society.

## The Classification of Tasks

The complete lists of tasks and competencies finally developed have been presented in Appendix Four. Where possible in each category, listening and speaking tasks and competencies which were considered to be equivalent have been given the same number and have been shown opposite each other in the table. Where no equivalent listening or speaking task was found, the appropriate space has been left blank. As stated above, listening and speaking skills were grouped in terms of categories on the ability dimension described; oral vocabulary, literal meaning, implied meaning, and analytical and critical thinking. The skills are those which could form part of an oral language development program in a school and are expressed in terms of tasks which could be performed by students or competencies which students might possess. Not all of the tasks and competencies listed would have a high priority in all schools but all are potential objectives of a school program.

The opinions of teachers, the Advisory Committee for the study and the research team were used in the selection of tasks for possible assessment. Thus the tasks were not selected on the basis of a factor analysis or other analytic method but on the collected judgements of the three groups described. Interested readers should inspect the complete lists of tasks in Appendix Four and the selected lists shown subsequently in this chapter in Table 4.5 and form their own opinions of the validity of the selections made. The selection method used is now described.

## Method of Task Selection

As described in the previous chapter, teachers were given the lists of listening and speaking tasks towards the end of the interview and asked

whether they considered each task was an essential, important, unimportant or undesirable component of a school's curriculum, on the basis of the importance of the task for the language development of students. The results from this questionnaire are given in the next section. In general, most teachers rated most of the tasks as essential or important, however the more formal tasks, such as debating, tended not to be considered as important and other tasks were also rated as important by fewer teachers.

The Advisory Committee provided an independent view of the importance of each of the tasks. At the time when the members made their assessments, the results of the teacher questionnaire were not known to them. However, they had access to lists of possible assessment procedures for each task, which the teachers did not have, when they rated the tasks. In considering priorities, the major concern of members of the Advisory Committee was the importance and significance of the task and they based their decisions to a large extent on the detailed suggestions for assessment which were provided by the research team. In doing this they were in a better position than the teachers had been because they had something more concrete on which to make a decision concerning the importance of the task than simply a statement of the task itself. It was also evident that the Committee members in addition took into consideration the possibility of making a reliable assessment of the task. Thus they were using more information than the teachers and were also, in part, working against different criteria in their estimation of importance. The Committee suggested priorities for assessment of tasks and these priorities were most useful in the selection process.

Finally, the research team added its view of the relative importance of each task and attempted to integrate the views of the teachers and Committee members. The team did this in the clear knowledge that the time available for assessment would be very limited and that a task would have to receive very high priority if it were to be assessed in the course of this study.

## Teacher Ratings of Importance

In the questionnaire included in the interviews with primary and secondary teachers, the teachers were asked to react to a large number of listening and speaking tasks presented to them. They were asked to classify each task as essential, important, unimportant or undesirable as a component of

a school's curriculum, on the basis of the importance of the task for the language development of students. The teachers were given the following definitions:

1. Essential: an essential task is one which students must be able to perform and which is essential in a school's language development program.

2. Important: an important task is one which students should be able to perform and one which is important, but not essential, in a school's program.

3. Unimportant: an unimportant task is one which students do not need to be able to perform, perhaps because it is trivial or little-used, and which therefore is relatively unimportant in a school's program.

4. Undesirable: an undesirable task is one which you would specifically exclude from a school's program, perhaps because it is totally irrelevant or even objectionable as a component of a language development program.

Completion of the questionnaire was located towards the end of the interview to ensure that the teachers could not have been influenced by its content or approach in giving their answers on the place of oracy in the curriculum and describing their teaching practices in the oracy area. Questionnaires were completed by 58 primary and 33 secondary teachers in four States. Because of the relatively small numbers of volunteer respondents, the information obtained has been used only as a general indication of the views of teachers. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix Three, after the interview schedule.

The Ratings Given

The teacher questionnaire was based on the tasks included in an original statement of listening and speaking objectives, not on the revised lists of tasks in Appendix Four. Consequently, the names of the four categories of listening and speaking abilities were different and there were also minor differences between the two statements for a few of the tasks themselves.

In general, both the primary and secondary teachers responded that most of the tasks listed were either essential or important. However, there were some tasks which received less support than others. Table 4.1

Table 4.1 Listening Tasks Considered Unimportant or Undesirable by at Least 20% of Teachers (Indicated by x)

| Task (Abbreviated) | Primary Teachers | Secondary Teachers |
|---|---|---|
| 1.4 Identifying rhyming words | | x |
| 2.2 Knowing meaning of slang terms, etc. | x | x |
| 3.6 Comprehending gestures and facial expressions | | x |
| 4.7 Evaluating organization of what is spoken | x | |
| 4.23 Identifying intended audience | x | |
| 4.25 Determining relative status of the speaker | x | x |
| 4.26 Determining relationships between speakers | x | x |

gives the listening tasks which were rated as being unimportant or undesirable by at least 20 per cent of either primary or secondary teachers. Speaking tasks similarly rated are listed in Table 4.2. These seven listening and nine speaking tasks were the only ones not to receive almost unanimous support from teachers. The only task considered to be unimportant or undesirable by a majority of teachers was chairing a meeting, seminar or debate. Very few teachers rated any task as undesirable. It is also of interest that the listening and speaking tasks most consistently given a

Table 4.2 Speaking Tasks Considered Unimportant or Undesirable by at Least 20% of Teachers (Indicated by x)

| Task (Abbreviated) | Primary Teachers | Secondary Teachers |
|---|---|---|
| 1.4 Supplying rhyming words | | x |
| 2.2 Supplying meaning of slang terms, etc. | x | x |
| 2.11 Supplying a commentary | x | x |
| 3.4 Using figurative language to create mood | x | |
| 3.10 Conversing in different situations | | x |
| 3.14 Describing atmosphere | x | |
| 3.17 Participating in drama | x | |
| 4.16 Participating in a debate | x | x |
| 4.19 Chairing a meeting, seminar or debate | x | x |

Table 4.3 Listening Tasks Considered Essential by at Least 80% of Teachers (xx) or 50% of Teachers (x)

| | Task (Abbreviated) | Primary Teachers | Secondary Teachers |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | Identifying spoken words using pictures | | x |
| 1.2 | Distinguishing between homonyms by context | x | |
| 1.3 | Knowing meaning of words by age level | xx | x |
| 2.3 | Comprehending literal meaning | x | x |
| 2.5 | Comprehending longer statements | | x |
| 2.6 | Comprehending directions, instructions and messages | xx | xx |
| 2.9 | Comprehending information in different situations | x | x |
| 4.3 | Judging the validity of the main idea | | x |
| 4.5 | Distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant details | x | x |
| 4.8 | Recognizing the speaker's purpose | x | x |
| 4.9 | Assessing the relevance to oneself and others | | x |
| 4.10 | Recognizing emotive language, propaganda, etc. | | xx |
| 4.11 | Distinguishing between fact and opinion | x | xx |
| 4.21 | Identifying underlying assumptions of a speaker | | x |

low rating were the ones concerned with the meaning of regionalisms, colloquialisms and slang terms (abbreviated to 'slang terms' in the Tables). Listening tasks concerned with status of and relationships between speakers were also consistently rated as relatively unimportant, as were the more formal speaking tasks of supplying a commentary, participating in a debate and chairing a meeting, seminar or debate.

Since most teachers rated most tasks as either essential or important, although they had expressed some concern during the interviews that time spent in developing and assessing oracy was limited, it was decided to isolate the tasks rated as essential. Two criteria were used: tasks which were considered essential by at least 80 per cent of teachers and by at least 50 per cent of teachers were selected. The listening and speaking tasks which met the criteria are listed in Table 4.3 and 4.4 respectively. It is clear that more of the tasks concerned with literal meaning and with analytical and critical thinking were rated as essential. No listening task from the implied meaning category was selected on these criteria.

Table 4.4 Speaking Tasks Considered Essential by at Least 80% of Teachers (xx) or 50% of Teachers (x)

| | Task (Abbreviated) | Primary Teachers | Secondary Teachers |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | Supplying names for pictures of objects | x | x |
| 1.3 | Supplying meaning of words by age level | x | |
| 1.8 | Reading aloud | x | |
| 1.10 | Repeating commonly used words | x | |
| 1.12 | Answering questions meaningfully | x | xx |
| 2.3 | Stating literal meaning | | x |
| 2.5 | Supplying literal meaning of longer statements | | x |
| 2.6 | Giving directions, instructions and messages | x | xx |
| 2.9 | Giving and requesting information in different situations | x | x |
| 2.13 | Stating personal details such as name and address | xx | xx |
| 2.14 | Describing objects by referring to detail | | x |
| 3.10 | Conversing in different situations | x | x |
| 3.12 | Describing a personal experience | x | x |
| 3.16 | Greeting people | | x |
| 4.3 | Arguing from a valid and accurate premise | | x |
| 4.4 | Organizing ideas logically and consistently | x | x |
| 4.5 | Using relevant material | | x |
| 4.6 | Providing sufficient information | | x |
| 4.7 | Presenting opinions logically | | x |
| 4.8 | Indicating purpose for speaking | x | x |
| 4.11 | Using facts appropriately | x | x |
| 4.17 | Contributing to a group discussion | | x |
| 4.18 | Arguing logically in a group discussion | | x |

The tasks most consistently rated as essential by both the primary and secondary teachers were those concerned with literal comprehension for listening and giving information and instructions for speaking. As might be expected, there was a greater tendency for the secondary teachers to rate many of the analytical and critical thinking tasks as essential. The difference in response to these tasks by the primary and secondary teachers was clearly related to the different ages of the students at the two levels of schooling. The speaking task related to the meaning of slang terms was the only task which no teacher rated as essential.

Although there were wide variations in the degree of support, it must be remembered that the majority of primary and secondary teachers stated that every listening task and every speaking task, except one, was essential or important for students. Although the numbers of teachers involved were relatively small, their views on importance of the tasks were quite consistent. Consequently, the results of the teacher questionnaire, though providing little assistance in selecting tasks, provided considerable justification for the researchers' contention that it was important for students to be able to perform the tasks selected for assessment.

## The Tasks Selected

When all the information had been collated and differing viewpoints considered, 22 listening and 22 speaking tasks had been selected as possible tasks for assessment. In many cases the selected tasks were made up of a number of tasks from the more complex list where there had been a large degree of overlap. Even after this had been done it was found that many of the assessments suggested could be made simultaneously because of the close relationship between the selected tasks. The tasks have been presented in Table 4.5 where it should be noted that abbreviated descriptions of tasks have been used. More complete names of tasks have been given in Appendix Four.

The relatively short lists of listening and speaking tasks selected were possible because there was a considerable measure of agreement between the teachers, members of the Advisory Committee and the research team concerning which were the more important tasks. However, there were differences. For example, teachers on average did not rate the listening tasks concerned with determining relative status of the speaker and determining relationships between speakers as important, whereas members of the Advisory Committee rated these tasks as very important. These tasks have been included in the selected list. The Advisory Committee also selected more of the tasks associated with implied meaning as very important, compared with the teachers' responses to these tasks, and some of these tasks have also been included in Table 4.5.

## Summary of Section B

A range of oracy tasks which requires students to possess significant abilities in listening and speaking has been identified. It was the general opinion of the teachers interviewed, the members of the Advisory Committee for the project, and the project staff that the tasks identified were

## Table 4.5 Tasks Selected for Possible Assessment

| Listening | | Speaking |
|---|---|---|
| Identifying spoken words | 1.1 | Supplying names of objects. |
| Recognizing stress patterns and sense groups | 1.7 | Using appropriate stress patterns and sense groups. |
| Dictation | 1.8 | Reading aloud. |
| | 1.12 | Answering questions meaningfully. |
| Comprehending probable meaning of a word. | 2.1 | Supplying probable meaning of a word. |
| Comprehending literal meaning. | 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 | Stating literal meaning. |
| Comprehending directions, instructions and messages. | 2.6 | Giving directions, instructions and messages. |
| Retaining and recalling facts. | 2.7 | Listing facts in correct order. |
| Recognizing repetition of same idea in different words. | 2.8 | Repeating an idea in different words. |
| Comprehending information in different situations. | 2.9 | Giving and requesting information in different situations. |
| | 3.16 | Greeting people. |
| | 2.13 | Stating personal details such as name and address. |
| | 2.14 | Describing objects by referring to detail. |
| Identifying mood and recognizing changes in tone and mood. | 3.3 | Speaking with feeling and emotion. |
| Recognizing appropriate intonation, expression, etc. | 3.5 | Using appropriate intonation, expression, etc. |
| Comprehending implied meaning. | 3.7, 3.8, 3.9 | Supplying inferential or implied meaning. |
| Comprehending conversation in differnt situations. | 3.10 | Conversing in different situations. |
| | 3.13 | Telling a story. |
| Making critical judgments. | 4.1 | Expressing critical judgments. |
| | 4.4 | Organizing, developing and presenting ideas. |
| Recognizing emotive language, propaganda, etc. | 4.10 | |
| Distinguishing between fact and opinion. | 4.11 | |
| | 4.12 | Summarizing ideas. |
| | 4.13 | Presenting a short talk. |
| Identifying underlying assumptions of a speaker. | 4.21 | |
| Discerning a speaker's probable intent when he uses sarcasm, irony or understatement. | 4.22 | |
| Identifying intended audience. | 4.23 | |
| Determining a speaker's probable attitude towards his subject . | 4.24 | |
| Determining relative status of the speaker. | 4.25 | |
| Determining relationships between speakers. | 4.26 | |

important for students to be able to perform. The abilities which students require to perform the tasks satisfactorily may need to be exercised in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes, and the framework proposed to classify oracy tasks has three dimensions - ability, context and purpose. The context and purpose dimensions have not been emphasised in this report; the ability dimension has been the focus of the classification of tasks used. However, the likely context and purpose of each listening and speaking task assessed is suggested when each task is reported in Chapters Seven and Eight.

It was clear from the interviews and questionnaires that the teachers considered the development of oracy abilities to be important, and this was particularly true for primary schooling. There was a tendency for the secondary teachers to feel that the development of listening and speaking abilities was largely the task of primary teachers, although they did agree that oracy was also important in secondary school programs. On balance, most teachers saw oracy as important in itself because of the emphasis on and needs for social communication, however, a significant minority of teachers saw oracy as important largely because of its contribution to the development of literacy by students.

There is a need for information on what students can and cannot do in the oracy area. Once this information has been assessed in specific terms, it would become possible to consider whether the current demands being made of students are appropriate. The degree to which the demands are appropriate would depend largely upon the type of student performance required, that is, whether the listening and speaking tasks identified are important for students. However, the level of performance required should also be considered: it could be that the level set by the tasks is too high or too low. Only by explicitly stating what it is that students are expected to be able to do and then considering their actual performance, could the demands being made of students in this area be evaluated.

By far the majority of the teachers interviewed saw a need for some assessment of listening and speaking abilities, and most of these teachers expressed interest in having available some means of assisting them to make their own assessments. Assistance sought could take the form of advice as to how to go about such assessments, or could require the provision of instruments which teachers would have available for use in their classrooms. If instruments were to be provided, they should be concerned with the

assessment of individual student performance on the specific tasks identified and classified as important. This type of assessment would enable subsequent learning experiences to be planned and structured.

SECTION C

# THE ASSESSMENT OF ORACY

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## CHAPTER FIVE

## TEST DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Once the feasibility of assessing the listening and speaking of primary and secondary school students had been established by the methods described in Section B, assessments were planned and implemented throughout Australia in 1978. Given the relative dearth of research work into oracy assessments, particularly speaking, some of the assessments made were exploratory in nature, and not all proved to be successful. Whereas details of the assessments are provided in Chapters Seven and Eight, the purpose of this brief chapter is to describe the test development process and the general methodology and administration of the testing program.

### Test Development

The assessment of listening and speaking abilities of 10-year-old and 14-year-old students was seen as a continuation of the Australian Studies in School Performance project which had been conducted in 1975 and reported in 1976 and 1977 (Keeves and Bourke, 1976; Bourke and Keeves, 1977). Consequently the same arguments that had directed that project towards the application of a functional approach to the assessment of reading, writing and numeration using criterion-referenced methods where possible, were also considered valid for the intended assessments of listening and speaking in 1978. In the case of listening, a criterion-referenced assessment approach similar in concept to that used for reading in 1975 was adopted. For speaking, some of the assessment criteria that had been used for writing were found to be applicable, and the concept of adequacy of response as a major component of speaking assessment reflects this orientation. As had been the case with writing, not all the speaking abilities thought to be important could be assessed in specific terms and global assessments of fluency, expressiveness and confidence were planned. The criterion-referenced concept of adequacy of response is similar to that of coherence measured by Novick and Waters in their interviews with primary school students (Novick and Waters, 1977:128-129). The assessments of fluency, expressiveness and confidence were derived from the same source. No measure of clarity of speech was attempted in the present study because of the difficulty of making reliable assessments of this characteristic by means of the resources available.

The listening and speaking tests were planned so that there was as much overlap as possible between the tests prepared for the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old students to enable comparisons in performance and estimates of growth between the two age levels to be made. After a considerable amount of field testing of the appropriateness of items, approximately three-quarters of the items used in the listening tests were common to both age levels. Planning for the speaking tests originally had somewhat more than a half of the items common to both age levels but, in the final analyses, less than a half of the items reported were common.

## Test Administration and Scoring

It was clear that if students were required to read or write in responding adequately to either the listening or the speaking tests, this would constitute a serious limitation to the tests. Consequently reading was reduced to a minimum by the use of audio-tape and printed pictures to provide the necessary stimulus material for the tests. The use of a tape for the listening tests, with the attendant administration and potential hearing difficulties, was considered preferable to asking the supervising teacher to read out the stimulus material. Not only was it preferable to standardize the test administration by using a tape, but the tape permitted a wider range of stimulus material than would otherwise have been possible. For example, a drama sequence involving several participants was included in the listening tests. The use of a tape recorder to record the students' responses for the speaking tests eliminated any need for writing answers. Teachers read the test to students in an interview situation except for those sections where the ability to read aloud was being assessed.

As mentioned in the previous section, the tests were, in most cases, administered by teachers. Where this proved to be difficult for schools to arrange, one of a number of ERDC research scholars undertook the testing. Detailed administration instructions were provided even for the listening tests which were largely self-contained. Teachers were asked to test the six students required in a group, seated in a semi-circle around the tape recorder so that all could hear it clearly. The tape contained all the necessary student instructions but teachers were asked (by the voice on the tape) to stop the recorder and to ensure that all students knew what to do. Students either placed a tick in the appropriate box for multiple choice items which were read to them (the alternative responses were also printed), or followed a simple instruction such as putting a cross on the picture of

an apple on the page in front of them. In this way any reading and writing which might have been necessary for the answering of test items by the students was all but eliminated by the test format. However the alternative responses for the multiple choice items were also printed on the students' answer booklets to act as prompts additional to those provided on the audio-tape. The transcript of the listening tests and the student answer booklets for the 10 and 14-year-old students have been reproduced in Appendix Five.

For the speaking tests, each student was 'interviewed' individually by the teacher (or research scholar) with the interview being recorded on tape. The teacher was asked to make it clear that there were no penalties for 'wrong' answers. A very detailed schedule was provided to assist teachers and to increase uniformity in presentation of the test. Where prompting was permitted, the nature of the prompt was given on the schedule. The students were also provided with a booklet containing the visual stimuli necessary for some test items. The speaking test or interview schedules and the booklet of stimulus material for both age levels have been reproduced in Appendix Six.

It was recognized that the test performance of those students who were interviewed by an adult they did not know may have been adversely affected. Consequently the relationship between the student and the speaking test administrator was recorded in each case and is considered in relation to student achievement in Chapter Nine.

The tests were returned by the schools to the ACER for scoring. Results for each student together with interpretative notes were sent to schools when scoring had been completed. Each item on the listening tests was simply scored as correct or incorrect and sub-test scores were calculated by adding results on the appropriate items. The speaking tests presented quite a different scoring problem. A number of different types of assessment were made as described in the previous section, sometimes simultaneously on the same response, and this alone would have made the scoring task onerous. However the recordings made of student responses were frequently not of a high standard and actually hearing what the student had said was often extremely difficult. In some cases the equipment was faulty and in other cases it had been poorly used. Thus scoring sometimes necessitated listening to each response several times. This greatly increased the time and expense of scoring the speaking tests. It was also found that these problems had an adverse effect on the reliability of assessments made when responses were marked by two different scorers working independently. As a consequence

some assessments were insufficiently reliable and were not reported with the other speaking test results.

Although many difficulties had been anticipated in the scoring of the speaking tests, the difficulties actually encountered were much greater than had been expected. Trial marking sessions were held and detailed guidelines were provided for scorers to follow, but it seemed that the length of the task, the fatigue caused by straining to hear some responses, and the fairly complex nature of the scoring task itself, combined to result in markers not always following the guidelines even when responses were easy to hear and when there should have been no doubt as to the appropriate score. Further details of the assessments made and the reliability of scoring are given in Chapter Eight when the results of the speaking tests are reported.

CHAPTER SIX

## THE STUDENT SAMPLES

### Introduction

The phase of the oracy study which was concerned with the assessment of specific competencies in listening and speaking was developed along the same lines as the assessment of reading, writing and numeration carried out by the ACER in 1975. It seemed desirable that the students tested in the oracy study should be selected from populations equivalent to those used in the 1975 study in order that comparisons could be made between student performance in literacy and in oracy. A basically similar sampling methodology was also employed in 1978 although there were differences in design necessitated by the nature of the tasks to be assessed in the oracy study. Details of the populations and sampling used in 1975 are contained in Keeves and Bourke (1976:12-24). These details are now summarised and differences between the sampling methodology employed in 1975 and that of 1978 are pointed out. The requirement was to provide assessments of student performance in the areas of listening and speaking for Australia as a whole.

### The Populations

Two populations, one primary and one secondary, were chosen for assessment. The populations were defined by age not by grade, although sampling by grade is known to be simpler than sampling by age. The different State policies on age of entry to schooling, promotion and curriculum content make grade sampling relatively meaningless when combining results to give estimates for Australia as a whole. Sampling by age does have the advantage that results are readily understood by interested persons not familiar with different State policies when Australian results are presented.

The two age groups selected were students aged 10 years and students aged 14 years as at 1 October 1978. Testing took place during October 1978. These are precisely the same populations used in the 1975 study when the rationale for the selection of these two age cohorts was summarised thus:

> Age 10:0 to 10:11 years, during the middle primary school period where the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, which influence to a major extent all further learning, should have been acquired; and
> Age 14:0 to 14:11 years, during the middle secondary school stage at a level immediately prior to the end of the period of compulsory schooling, where all students were still at school. (Keeves and Bourke, 1976:13)

Quite apart from the desirability of maintaining comparability with the 1975 study, these two age cohorts would seem to be the most appropriate to assess in a study of performance in listening and speaking. Some of the types of test items which were needed to test specific listening and speaking tasks seen as important did require the student to be able to read. This requirement effectively prevented a younger cohort than that aged 10 years from being used in the study although this may have been desirable for other reasons. A more limited range of tasks could be tested with younger children if the resources for conducting entirely individual assessments and developing appropriate test items which did not require reading could be found. The argument used in 1975 to support the selection of the 14-year-old age cohort was still appropriate in 1978 even though increasing proportions of students aged 15 years may have remained at school.

The populations were subject to one major restriction. Only students in normal schooling were included. The difficulty in arranging special testing for students in special schools for the blind, the deaf and the educationally subnormal, for example, would have been beyond the resources of the project. These students had also been excluded in 1975. The criteria for entry to special schools differ between States and between regions within States. Consequently there are some small inconsistencies in the compositions of the populations being studied. The excluded students were estimated to form approximately one per cent of the age cohorts in 1975 (Bourke and Keeves, 1977:32). There is no reason to expect that this estimate would be exceeded in 1978.

The sampling frame developed in 1975 by the ACER Survey Section was updated between 1975 and 1978 and used to operationalise the definitions of the populations for this study. The sampling frame, which consists of lists of schools in postcode order, provides the numbers of 10-year-old and 14-year-old students attending each school listed. In some cases these numbers were based on information obtained in 1977 and in other cases they were based on 1978 information. Inconsistencies resulting from differences of this type would be small when taken overall, although differences could be considerable in individual cases, particularly if a new school were selected in the sample.

The schools are classified by type and location in the sampling frames. The nine categories of schools used in the study are:

1 Government metropolitan schools
2 Government non-metropolitan primary/secondary schools
3 Government non-metropolitan schools
4 Catholic systemic metropolitan schools
5 Catholic systemic non-metropolitan schools
6 Independent Catholic metropolitan schools
7 Independent Non-Catholic metropolitan schools
8 Independent Catholic non-metropolitan schools
9 Independent Non-Catholic non-metropolitan schools.

At the request of the Northern Territory Education Department, Aboriginal schools were not included in the study although they had been included in 1975. The collection of performance data from the very small numbers of students involved would have presented considerable administrative difficulties. The omission of these schools would have had no detectable effect on the weighted results presented for Australia as a whole.

## The Samples

### The Sample Design

Two-stage stratified random samples, sampling first by school and then by students within a school, were drawn from each of the populations of 10 and 14-year-old students in normal schooling throughout Australia. Within each State and Territory the schools were sampled with a probability proportional to size as measured by the number of 10-year-old or 14-year-old students attending (as appropriate). Within each school, students of the appropriate age were selected at random. Although there are in Australia a small number of schools with students aged 10 years and students aged 14 years, in no school were both age groups tested.

The nature of the testing program for this study dictated that no more than six students at each school could be tested. The Speaking Test consisted of an individual interview which lasted, on average, 25 to 30 minutes. The Listening and Word Knowledge Tests were group tests requiring a total of 35 to 40 minutes to administer. Thus the total time required for the testing of six students at each school selected was of the order of three and a half to four hours. Discussions with school principals and teachers when the test items were being field tested indicated that this was the longest time commitment that many schools would tolerate before withdrawing from the study. The restriction in the number of students that could be included in the sample within each school meant that more schools needed to be selected than originally intended to obtain sufficient students to keep sampling errors at an

acceptable level. From the original intention to select 20 schools from each State and to test 15 students in each school, the number of schools was increased particularly for the larger States. As can be seen in Table 6.1 in the Designed Schools column, the New South Wales and Victoria samples were increased to approximately 40 schools and the Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia samples were increased to approximately 30 schools. Approximately 20 schools were selected from Tasmania and from the Australian Capital Territory, and 10 from the Northern Territory. The total designed sample size for each age level was thus approximately 1300 students.

Execution of the Sample Design

The samples of schools were drawn from the sampling frames by calculating the appropriate sampling fraction for each State and Territory for the number of schools required to be selected from each. The schools are listed in the sampling frames by type as previously described and then by postcode. If a school declined to take part in the study the next school on the list was selected as a replacement school. Thus the new school would be of the same type and, in most cases, in the same locality as the school it was replacing, the intention being that it should be as much like the school originally selected as possible.

Although the intention was that the designed samples would contain 40, 30, 20 or 10 schools, it will be noted that there are some variations from these numbers. Variations resulted from rounding of sampling fractions, from minor inconsistencies in sampling frame totals resulting from varying degrees of updating that had taken place for different school types, and from the small numbers of schools of some types in which it was necessary to choose between selecting one school or none where, mathematically, the selection of half a school was indicated by the design. It will be noted in Table 6.1 that the response rates for schools, as indicated by the achieved sample, was very high at 97 per cent and 99 per cent for the 10-year-old and 14-year-old student samples respectively.

The six students at each school were selected at random and then an additional four students were similarly selected as replacements for the original six students if required. Replacements were required when a selected student had left the school, was absent or was unavailable on the testing date, or where a parent had asked that his or her child be not tested. Parents had been sent a letter explaining the testing program and had the opportunity to withdraw their child if they wished.

Table 6.1 Summary of Designed and Achieved Samples for Each State and Territory

| State/Territory | Designed | | Achieved | | Ratio= Achieved / Designed | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Schools N | Students N | Schools N | Students N | Schools % | Students % |
| 10-Year-Old Sample | | | | | | |
| New South Wales | 41 | 246 | 40 | 240 | 98 | 98 |
| Victoria | 40 | 240 | 39 | 233 | 98 | 97 |
| Queensland | 30 | 180 | 29 | 172 | 97 | 96 |
| South Australia | 31 | 186 | 31 | 186 | 100 | 100 |
| Western Australia | 31 | 192 | 29 | 173 | 94 | 90 |
| Tasmania | 20 | 120 | 20 | 120 | 100 | 100 |
| ACT | 21 | 126 | 21 | 126 | 100 | 100 |
| Northern Territory | 10 | 60 | 8 | 48 | 80 | 75 |
| Total Sample | 224 | 1350 | 217 | 1298 | 97 | 96 |
| 14-Year-Old Sample | | | | | | |
| New South Wales | 42 | 252 | 42 | 250 | 100 | 99 |
| Victoria | 40 | 240 | 38 | 227 | 95 | 95 |
| Queensland | 30 | 180 | 30 | 180 | 100 | 100 |
| South Australia | 30 | 180 | 30 | 179 | 100 | 99 |
| Western Australia | 30 | 180 | 30 | 180 | 100 | 100 |
| Tasmania | 20 | 120 | 20 | 116 | 100 | 97 |
| ACT | 21 | 126 | 21 | 126 | 100 | 100 |
| Northern Territory[a] | 9 | 54 | 8 | 45 | 89 | 83 |
| Total Sample | 222 | 1332 | 219 | 1303 | 99 | 98 |

[a] Not enough schools were available for ten schools to be selected.

There were a few primary schools which did not have six students in the appropriate age range for the study. Rather than remove these schools from the study and thus eliminate small rural schools altogether, in each case the school selected was linked with the next school on the sampling frame to form a pseudo-school of at least six 10-year-old students. In one case three schools were required to make up six students, and all three schools were of similar size in the same locality.

The lists of students provided by each school were checked at ACER to ensure that students of the correct age had been selected, that all appropriate year levels were represented and that both male and female students had been

selected, when appropriate. A typed copy of the list of students was sent back to the school with the testing material, was used as an attendance register and was returned to the ACER when testing was complete. This enabled a check to be made that the correct students had been tested and indicated where and why replacement students had been used. Inspection of Table 6.1 indicates that the response rates were 96 per cent and 98 per cent for 10- and 14-year-old students respectively.

When all data had been collected it was necessary to weight the responses to produce statistics which represented the Australian populations of 10-year-old and 14-year-old students in normal schooling. A major distortion in the raw data had been created by the very large differences in State populations in spite of the somewhat larger samples used for the more populous States in this study. Minor distortions were also created by the small discrepancies between the designed and the achieved samples. Both distortions were removed by weighting the data from each State so that each State's contribution to the overall Australian data was proportional to the numbers of 10-year-old and 14-year-old students as assessed by the August 1978 school census. The school census information, sample sizes and weighting factors are shown in Table 6.2.

## Characteristics of the Samples

Some background information on the schools and students in the samples was collected at the time of testing. Schools were asked to complete a two-part questionnaire: a School Sheet consisting of questions relating to the school's program, school equipment usage and staffing information; and a Student Sheet with questions on attendance, teacher perceptions of students' problems, experience with tape or cassette recorders and information relating to the administration of the Speaking Test. The Student Sheet was completed by the class teacher (primary) or English teacher (secondary) of each of the six students in the sample. A copy of the complete questionnaire is included as Appendix Seven. Other school information such as school type and location was available from the sampling frames used when the schools were selected. Family background information relating to ethnicity, family size and parents' occupations was collected in the course of the Speaking Test, the schedule for which is given at Appendix Six.

The two age samples are now described in terms of the information available on the school, personal and home backgrounds of students. All proportions stated have been based on the data which have been weighted by State or

Table 6.2 Weighting Factors for State Samples

| State/Territory | Populations | | Achieved Samples | | Weighting Factors | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-Year-Old | 14-Year-Old | 10-Year-Old | 14-Year-Old | 10-Year-Old | 14-Year-Old |
| NSW | 81724 | 85193 | 240 | 250 | 1.781 | 1.767 |
| Victoria | 68484 | 67786 | 233 | 227 | 1.538 | 1.548 |
| Queensland | 38594 | 39291 | 172 | 180 | 1.174 | 1.132 |
| South Australia | 22637 | 23367 | 186 | 179 | 0.637 | 0.677 |
| Western Australia | 22532 | 22085 | 173 | 180 | 0.681 | 0.636 |
| Tasmania | 7740 | 8130 | 120 | 116 | 0.337 | 0.363 |
| ACT | 4250 | 3849 | 126 | 126 | 0.176 | 0.158 |
| Northern Territory | 2165 | 1642 | 48 | 45 | 0.252 | 0.189 |
| Totals | 248126 | 251343 | 1298 | 1303 | | |

Territory to produce information which is representative of Australian 10-year-old and 14-year-old students overall.

School Information

Naturally the school information collected was the same for all six students in the sample from the one school. The first two variables considered, school type and location, have no missing data associated with them because the information was extracted from the sampling frames. The information for the remaining school variables was obtained from the school co-ordinator for the study and the proportion of missing data associated with each variable is shown at the foot of each table.

School Type. Students attending Government, Catholic and Independent schools are known to differ in achievement in basic skill areas, particularly at age 14 years (Bourke and Keeves, 1977:81-107). It is reasonable to assume that there would also be achievement differences for listening and speaking. The nine categories of schools described earlier in this chapter were collapsed as follows:

Categories 1 to 3 - Government schools (G)
Categories 4 to 6 and 8 - Catholic schools (C)
Categories 7 and 9 - Independent schools (I)

The proportions of students attending schools of the three types distinguished are shown in Table 6.3. Almost four-fifths of the students in the samples attended Government schools, fewer than one fifth attended Catholic schools

Table 6.3 Type of School and School Location

| Student Sample | Type of School | | | School Location[a] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | G% | C% | I% | Metro % | Non-metro % |
| 10-year-old | 79 | 18 | 3 | 61 | 40 |
| 14-year-old | 79 | 15 | 6 | 60 | 40 |

[a] Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

and three per cent of the 10-year-olds and six per cent of the 14-year-olds attended Independent schools.

School Location. Although students attending schools in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas would seem to differ little in achievement in the basic skills generally, some more substantial differences have been found in relation to specific skills (Keeves and Bourke, 1976:98). Schools in Canberra and in the six State capitals were classified as metropolitan and other schools as non-metropolitan. The nine categories of schools in the sampling frame were collapsed as follows:

Categories 1, 4, 6 and 7 - Metropolitan

Categories 2, 3, 5, 8 and 9 - Non-metropolitan

The proportions of students attending metropolitan and non-metropolitan schools are shown in Table 6.3 where it can be seen that three-fifths of the students at both age levels were at metropolitan schools and two-fifths at non-metropolitan schools. The apparent discrepancy whereby the proportions of 10-year-old students add to 101 per cent results from rounding error when percentages were taken to the nearest whole number.

School Size. School size was measured by the number of teachers, or equivalent full-time teachers, at the school at the time of testing in October 1978 (Item 7 on the School Sheet section of the questionnaire). Recent research by Campbell et al (1979) concerning attitudes of students at smaller schools indicates that school size may well be related to student performance generally including oracy. The mean numbers of teachers per school for the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old students samples were 17.5 and 50.5 respectively. An indication of the distributions of school size is given in Table 6.4 where the numbers of teachers have been grouped into several categories and the proportions of sampled students in these categories are

Table 6.4 Distributions of Size of School Attended by Students

| Size of School (Category) | Number of Teachers | Proportion of Students (%) | Number of Students |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10-year-old students | | | |
| 1 | 1 - 5 | 7 | 85 |
| 2 | 6 - 10 | 15 | 192 |
| 3 | 11 - 15 | 20 | 255 |
| 4 | 16 - 20 | 23 | 292 |
| 5 | 21 - 25 | 15 | 191 |
| 6 | 26 - 30 | 10 | 124 |
| 7 | 31 - 42 | 8 | 108 |
| Missing data | - | 4 | 52 |
| 14-year-old students | | | |
| 1 | 2 - 19 | 11 | 148 |
| 2 | 20 - 29 | 10 | 129 |
| 3 | 30 - 39 | 11 | 147 |
| 4 | 40 - 49 | 9 | 118 |
| 5 | 50 - 59 | 19 | 246 |
| 6 | 60 - 69 | 14 | 186 |
| 7 | 70 - 79 | 13 | 167 |
| 8 | 80 + | 10 | 135 |
| Missing data | - | 2 | 28 |

shown in the body of the table. It will be noted that the largest primary school in the 10-year-old student sample had a staff of 42 teachers whereas the largest secondary school in the 14-year-old sample had in excess of 100 teachers. The categories shown in Table 6.4 will be used to compare student performance for varying school sizes.

Teacher Experience. Teacher experience was measured on a five-point scale ranging from less than 1 year to more than 10 years (see Item 8 on the School Sheet section of the questionnaire). The length of experience of classroom teachers and lower secondary English teachers was requested because it was thought that it would be these teachers who had the major impact on the listening and speaking abilities of the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old students respectively. The Advisory Committee for the study suggested that teacher experience might well be important in the difficult and relatively unstructured task of developing students' oral communication capabilities.

Table 6.5 Teacher Experience and Time at School

| Average Category for School | Teacher Experience | | | | Time at School | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-year-old students | % | 14-year-old students | % | 10-year-old students | % | 14-year-old students | % |
| Less than 1 year | 1 | | 3 | | 6 | | 9 | |
| Between 1 and 2 years | 4 | | 6 | | 35 | | 34 | |
| More than 2 but less than 5 years | 34 | | 45 | | 45 | | 48 | |
| Between 5 and 10 years | 50 | | 41 | | 8 | | 4 | |
| More than 10 years | - | | - | | - | | - | |
| Missing data | 11 | | 5 | | 6 | | 5 | |

The distributions of teacher experience for each school were indexed to give a single category indicating the average level of experience of teachers at the school. The distributions of the average level of experience were then re-grouped into the five categories shown in Table 6.5 where the proportions of students for each category are also given. It is of interest that the average experience of teachers in the primary schools sampled was greater than that in the secondary schools. However no primary or secondary school sampled had an average teacher experience of more than ten years. It will be noted that there are somewhat more missing data associated with this item than with previously-discussed items. Some inconsistencies in responses to this question were found and in these cases the data were coded as missing.

Time at School. The length of time primary classroom teachers and secondary English teachers had been at the school was coded on the same five-point scale that was used for teacher experience. The degree of student turbulence, as measured by the number of schools attended, was found by Bourke and Keeves (1977:98) to have a relatively small relationship with student achievement in reading, writing and numeration. It was thought that the stability of staff might be important for students' development of listening and speaking which are largely treated incidentally in school programs.

The average length of time teachers had been at the school was calculated for each school in the same way as was done for teacher experience. The distributions of students according to their teachers' average length of stay at the school may also be inspected in Table 6.5. By far the majority of schools had an average teacher time at the school of between one and five

Table 6.6 Sources of Language Programs

| Source | 10-year-old Student Sample (%) | 14-year-old Student Sample (%) |
|---|---|---|
| The district, region or wider grouping | 29 | 18 |
| The school | 59 | 28 |
| The language department or group of teachers | 23 | 76 |
| The individual teacher | 60 | 57 |
| Other [a] | 5 | 5 |
| Missing data | - [b] | - [b] |

a For example, other sources indicated included books and personal reading.

b Indicates less than 0.5%.

years. Again data which were suspected of being unreliable were coded as missing.

Sources of Language Program. The school coordinator for the study was asked to indicate the major sources of the (English) language program being taught in the school (Item 1 on the School Sheet of the questionnaire). This question follows on a similar question asked when teachers were interviewed at the earlier stage of the study reported in Section B. The proportions of teachers who indicated each major source are shown in Table 6.6. It is clear that most teachers indicated more than one major source of the program as they were invited to do, but that by far the most common major sources were those within the school itself. Approximately three-fifths of primary and secondary school coordinators indicated that the individual teacher was a major source. The school and groups of teachers within a school were also major sources of programs.

Analyses were carried out to determine the most common combination of sources where more than one source had been indicated. These are shown in Table 6.7 together with the rank order of frequency of occurrence for both samples. There was a greater tendency for primary schools to have a major input from the district or wider grouping than was the case for secondary schools. Very few schools indicated more than two major sources but the two most common groupings are shown.

Importance of Oracy. The school coordinator was also asked to rate the importance of developing listening and speaking abilities in the language program ideally and actually when compared with the importance of reading

Table 6.7 Some Common Combinations of Sources of Language Programs

| Combination of Sources | 10-year-old Student Sample | | 14-year-old Student Sample | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | Rank Order | % | Rank Order |
| Teacher + department or group | 7 | 4 | 39 | 1 |
| Teacher + school | 25 | 1 | 14 | 3 |
| School + district or wider group | 19 | 2 | 6 | 6 |
| School + department or group | 11 | 3 | 17 | 2 |
| Department or group + district or wider | 6 | 5 | 13 | 4 |
| Teacher + district or wider | 5 | 6 | 8 | 5 |
| Teacher + department + school | 7 | | 12 | |
| Teacher + department + district | 7 | | 8 | |

and writing (Item 2 on the School Sheet of the questionnaire). This section of the questionnaire was designed in the light of answers to questions concerning the importance of oracy asked during the teacher interviews reported in Section B. The proportions of responses are shown in Table 6.8. At both age levels oracy was stated by most teachers to be of equal importance with reading and writing ideally, but of lesser importance actually by the majority of teachers. The relatively high proportion of missing data in the actual column for the 14-year-old student sample is unfortunate. It would seem that some school coordinators, especially in secondary schools, did not feel able to indicate what actual importance was placed on listening and speaking in their school's program.

Differences in ideal and actual ratings given by individual schools indicate a dramatic shift at both age levels towards lesser importance in practice for listening and speaking. These differences were considered when relationships with student performance were calculated and reported.

Availability of Tape or Cassette Recorders. Item 4 on the School Sheet of the questionnaire requested the number of tape or cassette recorders in the school in functioning condition. When related to the number of teachers at the school this variable provided a measure of the availability of recorders. Recorders would seem to be a most important aid in a school's

Table 6.8 Importance of Oracy, Ideally and Actually

| Importance | 10-Year-Old Student Sample | | 14-Year-Old Student Sample | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Ideally % | Actually % | Ideally % | Actually % |
| Less important than reading and writing | 1 | 58 | 4 | 70 |
| Of equal importance with reading and writing | 72 | 36 | 82 | 21 |
| More important than reading and writing | 24 | 3 | 13 | 1 |
| Missing data | 4 | 4 | 1 | 8 |

language development program. A summary of the distribution of the number of recorders for every ten teachers at a school is shown in Table 6.9. In general the primary teachers had far more recorders at their disposal than did the secondary teachers when the size of the school was taken into consideration. The minimum number of recorders in a school was one for primary schools and two for secondary schools. The corresponding maximum numbers were 39 (primary) and more than 100 (secondary).

Overall School Use of Tape or Cassette Recorders. School coordinators were asked to indicate how frequently use was made of tape or cassette recorders in language programs at the school for each Year level in the primary or junior secondary school (Item 5 on the School Sheet of the questionnaire). They were offered four levels of frequency from 'Most days' to 'Rarely or never', plus a fifth option - 'Impossible to generalise'. The results have

Table 6.9 Availability of Recorders

| No. of Recorders for 10 teachers | 10-Year-Old Student Sample % | 14-Year-Old Student Sample % |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | - | 2 |
| 1 or 2 | 9 | 48 |
| 3 to 5 | 40 | 36 |
| 6 to 10 | 35 | 9 |
| More than 10 | 11 | 3 |
| Missing data | 5 | 2 |

Table 6.10 Overall School Use of Recorders, Radio and Television

| Overall School Use | Recorders | | Radio | | Television | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-y-o % | 14-y-o % | 10-y-o % | 14-y-o % | 10-y-o % | 14-y-o % |
| Most days | 11 | 3 | 9 | - | 14 | 6 |
| About once a week | 26 | 12 | 38 | 8 | 50 | 21 |
| Every now and again | 44 | 52 | 31 | 31 | 21 | 54 |
| Rarely or never | 11 | 16 | 16 | 54 | 8 | 14 |
| Missing data[a] | 8 | 17 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 6 |

a Answers of 'Impossible to generalise' have been added to missing data in this table.

been averaged and the distributions of mean results for each age level are shown in Table 6.10. There was considerably more use of tape or cassette recorders in the primary schools sampled than in the secondary schools. Whereas 37 per cent of the primary teachers responded that, on average, they used recorders at least once a week, only 15 per cent of secondary teachers in the sample responded similarly. However there were more missing data in the responses from secondary teachers, largely arising from their greater use of the 'impossible to generalise' option.

School Use of Radio Programs and Television. Items 6 and 7 on the School Sheet requested the same information with respect to radio programs and television that had been asked for recorders. The distributions of responses for radio and television are also shown in Table 6.10. The greater use of television than radio was evident for both age levels of students. Again usage of both the radio and television media by primary teachers was higher than that of secondary teachers and this was especially true of television where almost two thirds of the primary students used it at least once a week compared with less than one third of the junior secondary students. With the exception of the use of radio by secondary schools, where more than half used the radio rarely or never, the use of recorders, radio and television reported by teachers was quite high.

Individual Student Information

Data on individual students in the sample were obtained from the Student Sheet which formed part of the questionnaire completed by teachers and from the first section of the Speaking Test. It will be noted that there are more missing data associated with information obtained from the Speaking

Table 6.11 Distributions of Students by Year and Sex

| Sample of Students | Year Level | | | | | | | Sex | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | M | F |
| 10-Year-Old | | | | | | | | | |
| Number | 225 | 965 | 108 | | | | | 631 | 668 |
| Percentage | 17 | 74 | 8 | | | | | 49 | 51 |
| 14-Year-Old | | | | | | | | | |
| Number | | | | 7 | 316 | 916 | 64 | 578 | 725 |
| Percentage | | | | 1 | 24 | 70 | 5 | 45 | 56 |

Test, than that from the questionnaire. A few schools administered the Listening and Word Knowledge Tests to all six students but failed to administer the Speaking Test to all. In addition when students did do the Speaking Test, the responses to some sections of the test were inaudible in several cases owing to extraneous noise, faulty recording equipment or poor use of the tape recorder by the test administrator.

Age of Student. The age range of students in each sample was 12 months from 10:0 to 10:11 years and from 14:0 to 14:11 years with mean ages of 10:6 and 14:6 years respectively. The age of students was related to their Year level and to the State or Territory in which they lived. These relationships will be examined in later Chapters.

Year Level of Student. As stated earlier, one of the penalties of taking an age sample is that a range of Year levels results. It could reasonably be expected that Year level would be strongly related to student achievement in listening and speaking in the same way it was found to be related to reading and numeration in 1975 (Bourke and Keeves, 1976:89-91). By far the majority of 10-year-old students were in Year 5 and 14-year-old students in Year 9 as can be seen in Table 6.11 where the distributions of students are shown. However there were also substantial numbers of 10-year-old students in Year 4 and 14-year-old students in Year 8.

Sex of Student. The sample of 10-year-old students consisted of approximately half males and half females. The disparity in numbers of males and females in the sample of 14-year-old students was marked, particularly insofar as the school census information for 1978 indicated that there were three per cent more males aged 14 years than females of the same age attending school. Table 6.11 shows that there were 11 per cent more females

Table 6.12 Distributions of Student Absence in 1978

| Number of days absent (2 terms) | 10-Year-Old Students | | 14-Year-Old Students | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| 0 | 124 | 10 | 141 | 11 |
| 1 - 2 | 271 | 21 | 241 | 19 |
| 3 - 5 | 342 | 26 | 281 | 22 |
| 6 - 10 | 267 | 21 | 271 | 21 |
| 11 - 15 | 103 | 8 | 128 | 10 |
| 16 + | 90 | 7 | 112 | 9 |
| Missing data | 102 | 8 | 130 | 10 |

than males in the sample of 14-year-old students. In investigating the possible reasons for such an imbalance between the sexes, it was noted that there were more than 30 single sex girls' schools in the secondary sample but only about 20 boys' schools. In particular girls' schools predominated in New South Wales which received the highest weighting when Australian figures were calculated. There was no evidence in the information collected from coeducational schools that boys were more frequently absent than girls although this may have been a contributing factor to the imbalance in the 14-year-old sample.

Student Attendance Record. The number of days absent for the first two school terms in 1978 was recorded for each student. The distributions of student absence were then consolidated into five categories and are shown in Table 6.12. It will be noted that the attendance of the 10-year-old students was only marginally higher than that of the 14-year-old students with 57 per cent of 10-year-old and 52 per cent of 14-year-old students having no more than five days absence. The absences of males and females in the samples were compared but virtually no differences were found.

Student Listening or Speaking Problems and Remedial Help Received. The appropriate teacher for each student was asked to indicate whether the student had problems with listening or speaking and whether (to the best of his or her knowledge) the student was receiving remedial help with listening and/or speaking outside normal classroom lessons (Items 14 and 15 on the Student Sheet of the questionnaire). The results for these items were remarkably consistent between the two age levels concerned and are shown in Table 6.13. As might be expected the majority of students were not considered to have problems. However there were significant numbers of students,

Table 6.13 Teacher Perception of Listening and Speaking Problems by Receipt of Remedial Help

| Remedial Assistance | Problem 10-Year-Old Students None % | Minor % | Major % | Total % | Problem 14-Year-Old Students None % | Minor % | Major % | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Listening | | | | | | | | |
| Receives help | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3[a] |
| Does not receive help | 76 | 15 | 2 | 94[a] | 79 | 14 | 2 | 95 |
| Totals | 77 | 16 | 3 | 97[b] | 80 | 16 | 3 | 99[b] |
| Speaking | | | | | | | | |
| Receives help | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3[a] |
| Does not receive help | 77 | 15 | 1 | 93 | 75 | 19 | 1 | 95 |
| Totals | 78 | 16 | 2 | 96[b] | 75[a] | 21 | 2 | 98[b] |

a Discrepancy in total arises from rounding errors.

b The total is less than 100 per cent as a result of missing data.

amounting to approximately one fifth of the samples, who were considered to have problems in either listening or speaking or both. Of the students who were perceived by teachers as having only a minor problem, very few received help, and of students perceived to have a major problem approximately half were receiving help. At both age levels students considered to have a major speaking problem were more likely to be receiving help than students with a listening problem.

School Use of Recorders by the Student. The appropriate teacher was asked to indicate the degree of use of a tape or cassette recorder by each student in the sample in the language course being followed (Item 16 on the Student Sheet). Inspection of the data in Table 6.14 indicates that, although considerably greater use was made of recorders by the primary students sampled, for both age levels there were high proportions of students who used the recorders rarely or not at all in their language programs. This may prove to be important when the performances of students in this study are considered because of the need to use a cassette recorder in the delivery of the Listening Test and the recording of the Speaking Test.

Family Size and Place in Family. In the first section of the Speaking Test students were asked the numbers of brothers and sisters they had and where

Table 6.14 Use of Recorder in Language Program by Individual Students

| Degree of Use | 10-Year-Old Students | | 14-Year-Old Students | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| Most days | 9 | 1 | 2 | - |
| About once a week | 161 | 12 | 32 | 3 |
| Every now and again | 592 | 46 | 473 | 36 |
| Rarely or never | 500 | 39 | 763 | 59 |
| Missing data | 38 | 3 | 34 | 3 |

they came in the family. Family size, where there were more than three children, was shown to be important for reading and numeration by Bourke and Keeves (1977:89 and 102) and, with much oral language development taking place in the home, it could be expected that family size would be no less important for listening and speaking. The distributions of family size and place in family are shown in Table 6.15. The very high level of missing data for place in family results largely from insufficient probing by the test administrator to determine accurately the student's place.

Place in family has been related to family size for later analyses with student performance in listening and speaking and the groupings made and distributions of students are shown in Table 6.16. As there were few 'only child' students in the samples, these have been grouped with the first born of families of two or three children. Groupings have also been made for larger families where there were small numbers of students in the samples. The categories have been kept constant for the two age groups.

Table 6.15 Family Size and Place in Family

| Number of Children and Place in Family | 10-Year-Old Students | | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Size | % | Place | % | Size | % | Place | % |
| 1 | 5 | | 30 | | 2 | | 25 | |
| 2 | 30 | | 22 | | 21 | | 24 | |
| 3 | 28 | | 14 | | 32 | | 14 | |
| 4 | 19 | | 7 | | 19 | | 8 | |
| 5 | 8 | | 3 | | 13 | | 5 | |
| 6 | 4 | | 2 | | 4 | | 2 | |
| 7 | 2 | | 1 | | 3 | | 1 | |
| 8 or more | 2 | | 1 | | 5 | | 2 | |
| Missing data | 4 | | 21 | | 2 | | 19 | |

Table 6.16 Place by Size of Family

| Category | 10-Year-Old Students | | 14-Year-Old Students | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| 1st out of 1, 2 or 3 | 327 | 25 | 266 | 20 |
| 2nd out of 2 or 3 | 232 | 18 | 230 | 18 |
| 3rd out of 3 | 98 | 8 | 99 | 8 |
| 1st out of 4 or 5 | 53 | 4 | 61 | 5 |
| 2nd or 3rd out of 4 or 5 | 120 | 9 | 150 | 12 |
| 4th or 5th out of 4 or 5 | 104 | 8 | 129 | 10 |
| 1st to 3rd out of 6 or more | 22 | 2 | 28 | 2 |
| 4th or 5th out of 6 or more | 20 | 2 | 34 | 3 |
| 6th or more out of 6 or more | 49 | 4 | 62 | 5 |
| Missing data | 272 | 21 | 245 | 19 |

Country of Birth and Years in Australia. The student's and his or her parents' countries of birth were obtained in the course of the Speaking Test. A summary of the distributions for both age groups is given in Table 6.17. Small categories have been collapsed as indicated. Whereas only approximately one tenth of the students who responded to this item had been born overseas, almost one third of their parents were not born in Australia.

Table 6.17 Country of Birth for Students and Their Parents

| Country | 10-Year-Old Students | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Student % | Father % | Mother % | Student % | Father % | Mother % |
| Australia | 86 | 58 | 61 | 87 | 64 | 65 |
| UK, Eire and New Zealand | 5 | 11 | 10 | 7 | 11 | 12 |
| Greece | - | 3 | 3 | - | 2 | 3 |
| Italy | - | 4 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Other Europe | 2 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 5 |
| Other | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Missing data[a] | 5 | 13 | 12 | 2 | 9 | 9 |

a Some instances of missing data arise from a failure to ask the question, others from the student not knowing his parent's country of birth and some from inaudible responses on the tape.

Table 6.18 Languages Spoken in the Homes of Students

| Language Combination | 10-Year-Old Students | | 14-Year-Old Students | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| English only | 962 | 74 | 1023 | 79 |
| English + North European language | 43 | 3 | 25 | 2 |
| English + South European language | 86 | 7 | 97 | 7 |
| English + Other language | 14 | 1 | 12 | 1 |
| No English spoken | 35 | 3 | 16 | 1 |
| Missing data | 159 | 12 | 130 | 10 |
| Totals | 1299 | 100 | 1303 | 100 |

The number of years students had lived in Australia was also obtained in the course of the Speaking Test. Approximately seven per cent of the 10-year-old student sample had been in Australia for less than ten years, and approximately ten per cent of the 14-year-old students had been in Australia for less than 14 years. As was consistent with the results for the question relating to country of birth, approximately 90 per cent of students in the 10-year-old and 14-year-old samples had been in Australia for 10 and 14 years respectively.

Languages Spoken in the Home. Students were asked to indicate up to two languages regularly spoken at home. No order of precedence was requested or assumed for languages when two were given. Two languages were given by 14 per cent of 10-year-old and by 11 per cent of 14-year-old students who responded to this question. A distribution of language usage in the home is given in Table 6.18 which has been developed in exactly the same way as a similar table developed by Keeves and Bourke (1976:97). It will be noted that only three per cent of 10-year-old and one per cent of 14-year-old students came from homes where no English was spoken. The move to English in older families was also clear in the higher proportion of students aged 14 years from homes where English was the only language spoken.

With missing data allocated to categories in the same proportions as the responses obtained, these responses were compared with the proportions of 10- and 14-year-old students in the different language categories from the 1975 study reported by Keeves and Bourke. The distributions, as shown in Table 6.19, are very similar.

Table 6.19 Comparison of Proportions in Different Language Categories in 1978 and 1975

| Language Combination | 10-Year-Old Students | | 14-Year-Old Students | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1978 % | 1975[a] % | 1978 % | 1975[a] % |
| English only | 83 | 85 | 86 | 87 |
| English + North European language | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| English + South European language | 7 | 7 | 8 | 6 |
| English + Other language | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| No English spoken | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Number of Students | 1299 | 6628 | 1303 | 6247 |

a These proportions were calculated from the weighted numbers of students contained in Table 9.1 of Volume I of the Australian Studies in School Performance (Keeves and Bourke, 1976:91).

Parental Occupations. Students were asked their parents' occupations and, where there was a need for further clarification, were asked what their father or mother actually did at work. This was necessary because students frequently gave the place where their parents worked rather than the nature of the work. The actual questions asked are in the first section of the Speaking Test in Appendix Six. The 16-point ANU scale of occupations was used to code the occupations given (Broom et al, 1977) and five additional categories were used to record answers of inadequately defined, home duties, retired or pensioned, deceased but no other information, and unemployed with no information on usual occupation. Summaries of fathers' and mothers' occupational levels on a six-point scale are given in comparison with the 1971 male workforce in Table 6.20 together with the categories added in the present study. Inspection of the table suggests that, with the exception that the present study would seem to have too small a proportion of fathers who were white collar workers, the distributions are similar to that of the 1971 census. It should be remembered that the occupations recorded for this study are those of a restricted range of the population, namely the parents of 10- or 14-year-old students.

Word Knowledge Scores. A short 10-minute word knowledge test developed by R.L. Thorndike (1973) was administered to each sample of students to obtain information on their verbal ability. This was the same test administered for the Australian Studies in School Performance (ASSP) project in 1975 and,

Table 6.20 Parental Occupations Compared with the Workforce in 1971

| Occupational Classification | 10-Year-Old Students | | 14-Year-Old Students | | Workforce 1971 Census[a] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Father % | Mother % | Father % | Mother % | % |
| Professional | 10 | 8 | 13 | 8 | 12 |
| Managerial | 9 | - | 17 | 2 | 10 |
| White collar | 7 | 7 | 9 | 14 | 19 |
| Skilled manual | 20 | 1 | 17 | 2 | 13 |
| Semi-skilled manual | 16 | 11 | 15 | 8 | 18 |
| Unskilled manual | 16 | 11 | 12 | 12 | 17 |
| Inadequately defined | 8 | 9 | 5 | 4 | |
| Home duties | - | 47 | - | 47 | |
| Retired or pensioned | 1 | - | 2 | 1 | |
| Deceased | 5 | 1 | 6 | 1 | |
| Unemployed | 2 | - | 1 | - | |
| Missing data | 7 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 11 |

a Extracted from Broom et al (1977:113). Census data for 1976 was not available.

in the case of the 14-year-old students, had been used in the 1970 IEA Science Project (Keeves and Bourke, 1976; Comber and Keeves, 1973). Different tests were administered to the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old students and the mean scores, after correcting for guessing, are shown in Table 6.21 for Australian students overall. Differences in the samples would create very minor differences in results because of the relatively small numbers of students attending schools in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, and this would be particularly true for the sample drawn in 1970. It can be seen in Table 6.21 that the mean scores for the Word Knowledge tests in 1978 were marginally higher than those in 1975 for both the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old students although, in the case of the 14-year-old students, not as high as in 1970. However differences between 1978 scores and scores in 1970 and 1975 were not statistically significant.

Table 6.21 Australian Student Performance on Word Knowledge Tests

| Year/Project | 10-Year-Old Students | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SE[d] | No. | Mean | SE[d] | No. |
| 1970 IEA Science[a] | Not tested | | | 16.1 | 0.31 | 5290 |
| 1975 ASSP[b] | 15.8 | 0.32 | 6628 | 14.8 | 0.26 | 6247 |
| 1978 Oracy Assessment[c] | 16.9 | 0.70 | 1299 | 15.2 | 0.57 | 1303 |

a This study did not include students from the ACT or the Northern Territory.
b This study included all students in normal schooling in Australia.
c This study included all students except those attending Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory.
d Design effect taken as 6.25.

## Summary

This chapter has contained a description of the sample design and the samples of students drawn from the populations of 10-year-old and 14-year-old students in normal schooling throughout Australia. Two-stage stratified random samples of approximately 1300 students were drawn from approximately 250,000 students at each age level. The samples were described in terms of school variables and individual student and family background variables obtained from a two-part questionnaire administered during testing and from the speaking test itself. Each of the variables used in this chapter to describe the samples of students tested was included in the analyses reported in Chapter Eleven. In that chapter the relative importance of the whole range of variables for students' listening and speaking performances is described and discussed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

# LISTENING TEST RESULTS

## Test and Sub-test Structures

The listening tests used in this study were developed as a result of the application of an assessment model to the tasks identified by teachers and others as important and selected for measurement. The assessment model and the methods of identification and selection of tasks were described in Chapter Four. It will be recalled that the model maintained that there were three dimensions which were important for the assessment of listening and speaking activities. The dimensions were ability, context and purpose. The key dimension of ability was used in the overall design of the listening tests and the various sub-tests described in this chapter were constructed to assess specific ability-related tasks.

The overall context of the listening tests was formal with the students listening to a tape recorder that provided the test instructions, stimulus material and test items. The students responded by marking an answer booklet. However within the overall formal structure of the listening tests, there was a variation in context for the stimulus material and test items used. The variations in context will be indicated subsequently in this chapter and may be inspected in Appendix Five where the content of both listening tests is given. The consideration of five purposes a person may have for listening which were identified in Chapter Four, were restricted in the context of the listening tests developed. Assessments were made of abilities over the range of three purposes in the areas of personal, classroom and citizenship. These will also be indicated later in this chapter.

The overall structure of the listening tests for the 10-year-old and 14-year-old students was the same in that each had five sections concerned with assessing the student abilities listed below. Each section constituted a sub-test determined by logical (not empirical) divisions of the abilities being tested.

Section A - Comprehending Words and Statements
Section B - Understanding Instructions
Section C - Comprehending Passages
Section D - Comprehending Conversation
Section E - Comprehending in Different Situations.

There was a large degree of overlap between the tests for students at the two age levels, not only in terms of abilities assessed, but also in the test items used. Where it was considered appropriate to the students' experience, the same test items were used in both the tests for 10-year-olds and 14-year-olds to permit comparisons in performance to be made. However different stimulus material and test items were used where field trials had indicated that this was necessary if reliable assessments were to be made.

Other more specific abilities were also assessed by the identification of sub-tests within each of the listening tests. Items testing these abilities were, in some cases, nested within a section of the test and, in other cases, they cut across two or more sections. The specific abilities assessed included the following:

Comprehending Literal Meaning
Comprehending Implied Meaning
Recognizing Mood
Recognizing Emotional Language
Identifying Audience
Identifying Purpose
Making Critical Judgements

Listings of the items which made up each of the sub-tests for the 10- and 14-year-old students are shown in Table 7.1. Two other sub-tests not previously mentioned were also identified. One consisted of all items that were common to both age levels and is referred to as the Anchor Items Sub-test. The other was made up of all common items that assessed the comprehension of literal meaning which was considered to be one of the most important listening abilities measured by the tests. The items constituting these sub-tests are also shown in Table 7.1. It will be noted that many of the sub-tests overlap, that is some of the sub-tests consist of different combinations of the same items. Thus some sub-test scores are not independent measures of students performance and this should be remembered when results on individual sub-tests are discussed later in this chapter.

## Interpretation of Performance Levels

In order to consider and compare student performance across the wide range of sub-tests in each of the listening tests, it was necessary to decide upon a method of summarising performance on each sub-test. The method used

## Table 7.1 Classification of Listening Test Items into Sub-Tests for the 10-Year-Old and 14-Year-Old Students.

| Sub-Test | Age Level | Item Numbers | | | | | Number of Items | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Section A | Section B | Section C | Section D | Section E | 10-Year-Old | 14-Year-Old |
| A. Comprehending Words & Statements | 10 & 14 | 1-10 | | | | | 10 | 10 |
| B. Understanding Instructions | 10 | | 1-10 | | | | 10 | |
| | 14 | | 1-5 | | | | | 5 |
| C. Comprehending Passages | 10 & 14 | | | 1-12 | | | 12 | 12 |
| Comprehending Long Passages | 14 | | | 13-17 | | | - | 5 |
| D. Comprehending Conversation | 10 | | | | 1-3,5,6 | | 5 | |
| | 14 | | | | 1-7 | | | 7 |
| Identifying Audience | 10 & 14 | | | | | 1-5 | 5 | 5 |
| Identifying Purpose | 10 & 14 | | | | | 6-10 | 5 | 5 |
| Comprehending Words | 10 & 14 | 1-5 | | | | | 5 | 5 |
| Comprehending Statements | 10 & 14 | 6-10 | | | | | 5 | 5 |
| Comprehending Short & Long Passages | 14 | | | 1-17 | | | - | 17 |
| Comprehending Literal Meaning | 10 | | | 1-3,5-8,10-12 | 3 | | 11 | |
| | 14 | | | 1-3,5-8,10-16 | | | | 14 |
| Comprehending Implied Meaning | 10 | | | 4,9 | 1,2,6 | | 5 | |
| | 14 | | | 4,9,17 | 4,6,7 | | | 6 |
| Literal Meaning Anchor Items | 10 & 14 | | | 1-3,5-8,10-12 | | | 10 | 10 |
| Recognizing Mood | 14 | | | | 1-3,5 | | - | 4 |
| Making Critical Judgements | 10 | | | | 1,2,5,6 | 1-10 | 14 | |
| | 14 | | | | 1-7 | 1-10 | | 17 |
| E. Comprehending in Different Situations | 10 & 14 | | | | | 1-10 | 10 | 10 |
| Recognizing Emotional Language | 10 | | | | 5 | 1,5-10 | 8 | |
| | 14 | | | | 1-3,5 | 1,5-10 | | 11 |
| Total Anchor Items | 10 & 14 | 1-10 | 1-5 | 1-12 | | 1-10 | 37 | 37 |
| Total Test | 10 | 1-10 | 1-10 | 1-12 | 1-3,5,6 | 1-10 | 47 | |
| | 14 | 1-10 | 1-5 | 1-17 | 1-7 | 1-10 | | 49 |

was to calculate the proportion of students who reached a pre-determined level of performance on each sub-test, the level indicating student success on a specific task or range of tasks. The level of performance required by a student was indicated by the proportion of items answered correctly, and this proportion of items was referred to as the cutting score for the test or sub-test. The nature of the tasks assessed was such that it was anticipated that the distributions of scores would be skewed to an extent that the mean scores on sub-tests would not be a valid method of describing the results obtained. The level of performance required for each test and sub-test was taken to be 80 per cent, that is students were expected to be correct 80 per cent of the time when answering from the population of items in an area covered by a test or sub-test. This criterion level was chosen primarily because it was considered to be appropriate for the types of tasks assessed but also because it was also the level used in assessing student performance in reading and numeration in the Australian Studies in School Performance project. Comparisons between the two studies would therefore be possible. The requirement of an 80 per cent level of performance on specific tasks by each student is high enough to make it very likely that a student who reached this level on a sample of items would be successful on similar items, yet not so high as to be an unreasonable requirement. The detailed argument presented to justify the selection of the 80 per cent criterion level of performance in calculating the proportion of students considered to have demonstrated that they could do each task is not repeated here, but may be inspected in Bourke and Keeves (1977:33-41).

The items which made up each sub-test were intended to be a representative sample of all possible items which could have been used to assess student performance in the given area. As with any sampling from a population, errors exist in the results of every sub-test and, in calculating a cutting score distinguishing students who had reached the 80 per cent criterion level from those who have not, the errors involved should be minimised. Factors involved in determining cutting scores indicating the required performance level were knowledge of the nature of the distributions, the possibility of guessing, and an estimation of carelessness.

The Nature of the Distributions

As stated above the distributions of scores on the listening test and sub-tests were expected to be skewed, and this proved to be the case. If errors of classification of students above and below the various cutting

scores were to be minimised, it was necessary that the nature of the distributions be recognized when the cutting scores were calculated. The method adopted involved using the distribution of total test scores as prior information when the cutting score was calculated for each sub-test and as collateral information when the cutting score was calculated for the total test itself.

The Possibility of Guessing

The proportion of correct responses to a sub-test which most accurately estimated a criterion level of 80 per cent would depend upon the possibility of a student guessing the correct answer. Most of the items in the listening tests were of a multiple choice type with four responses, although some items required a constructed response where the probability of correctly guessing the answer would be virtually zero. Consequently an appropriate adjustment for guessing was incorporated into the calculation of the cutting score for each sub-test where the measurement error was minimised.

Errors due to Carelessness

In any testing situation it is possible for a student who knows the correct response to an item to record a different response as a result of nervousness, haste or lack of care, among other possible causes. With the stimulus material and questions being received from a tape recorder, a situation which was to some degree unfamiliar to most students, it was particularly likely that these errors would be present. Although we have little knowledge of the frequency of this type of error, summarized as carelessness, it could be present for constructed response items as well as for multiple choice items. A small adjustment for carelessness has been made in the calculation of cutting scores for these tests.

The actual method used to determine cutting scores for the total tests and sub-tests has been outlined in Appendix Nine. The method follows that used by Morgan in the calculation of cutting scores in the Australian Studies in School Performance (Bourke and Keeves, 1977:279-296), and the actual cutting scores are shown in Table 7.2. It will be noted that for some sub-tests using the same items, the cutting score for the 10-year-old students differed from that for the 14-year-old students. This situation arose because the majority of 14-year-old students had performed very well on such sub-tests. The distributions of scores were therefore very highly skewed and the cutting score that minimised errors was lower than it would

Table 7.2 A Summary of Listening Test and Sub-test Results for 10-Year-Old and 14-Year-Old Australian Students

| Test and Sub-test | 10-Year-Old Students | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. of Items | No. Items Required | % Students Successful | No. of Items | No. Items Required | % Students Successful |
| *Comprehending Words & Statements | 10 | 8 | 97 | 10 | 8 | 100 |
| Understanding Instructions | 10 | 6 | 100 | 5 | 2 | 100 |
| *Comprehending Passages | 12 | 10 | 25 | 12 | 9 | 74 |
| Comprehending Longer Passages | Not tested | | | 5 | 4 | 30 |
| Comprehending Conversation | 5 | 4 | 65 | 7 | 5 | 88 |
| *Comprehending in Different Situations | 10 | 8 | 47 | 10 | 8 | 80 |
| Comprehending Literal Meaning | 11 | 9 | 27 | 14 | 11 | 43 |
| Comprehending Implied Meaning | 5 | 4 | 59 | 6 | 4 | 88 |
| Making Critical Judgements | 14 | 12 | 23 | 17 | 13 | 85 |
| Recognizing Mood | Not tested | | | 4 | 3 | 89 |
| Recognizing Emotional Language | 8 | 7 | 23 | 11 | 8 | 88 |
| *Literal Meaning Anchor Items | 10 | 8 | 32 | 10 | 8 | 62 |
| *Total Anchor Items | 37 | 30 | 56 | 37 | 29 | 94 |
| Total Test | 47 | 38 | 62 | 49 | 39 | 79 |

* An asterisk indicates a test which was identical for both age levels.

otherwise have been. Comparisons between the age levels become difficult in these cases but are considered towards the end of this chapter.

## Listening Test Results

All results presented in this chapter are those for all Australian students. Results for each State and Territory have been weighted and the percentages of students who reached the cutting scores for the major sub-tests and total tests are given in Table 7.2 together with the total numbers of items and the numbers of correct items required for students to be considered as successful on the sub-tests and tests. The distributions of scores on each sub-test and the total tests are shown in Appendix Eight. This appendix also gives indices of test reliability for the total test and the five major sub-tests. The composition of each sub-test and the performance of students are discussed in this section and the actual test items are shown in Appendix Five.

### Comprehending Words and Statements

This sub-test was intended to identify students who suffered from poor hearing, especially when a tape recorder was involved, or who were unable to identify single words, simple concepts or short statements. Each item consisted of a statement produced by the tape recorder and four pictures on a page in front of the student. The student was required to listen to the statement and to indicate which of the four pictures illustrated the statement. No reading was required by the student. Statements ranged from 'The bottle is empty', where 'empty' was the only word requiring identification, to 'The woman was surprised to see the horse inside', where comprehension of the whole statement was necessary if the student was to identify the correct picture. This sub-test was placed at the beginning of both listening tests to give students an opportunity to become familiar with the particular test situation being used. It was considered that very few students would have any trouble with this sub-test. In terms of the context and purpose dimensions the context of this sub-test was formal and the purpose could be any of those identified but would certainly be applicable for personal or classroom situations.

Students at both age levels did the same sub-test. Less than one half of one per cent of 14-year-old students failed to reach the cutting score for this sub-test and three per cent of the 10-year-old students failed to reach the cutting score of eight out of ten items. For the 10-year-old students the sub-test was then split into two smaller sub-tests of five items each, the more simple sub-test concerned with the comprehension and identification of words and the other with whole statements. When a cutting

Table 7.3 Comparison of Results on Two Items Common to the 1975 Reading Tests and the 1978 Listening Tests

| Item | 10-Year-Old | | 14-Year-Old | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Reading[a] | Listening | Reading[a] | Listening |
| Chose aeroplane | 96 | 84 | 99 | 95 |
| Horse inside | 97 | 98 | 99 | 100 |

a Extracted from Bourke and Lewis (1976:1.4, 1.6, 4.4, 4.6).

score of four out of five items was used for these sub-tests 98 per cent of the students reached the cutting score for the sub-test concerned with words only and 97 per cent reached the cutting score for the sub-test requiring the comprehension of simple statements. The characteristics of these students will be investigated and reported in Chapter Eleven.

Two of the items in this sub-test were identical in content with items used in the reading tests for the Australian Studies in School Performance project in 1975. These were the items, 'He chose the biggest aeroplane' and 'The woman was surprised to see the horse inside'. For the reading tests the students needed to be able to read and comprehend the sentences so that they could mark the appropriate pictures, and for the listening tests they needed to listen to and comprehend the statements and mark the appropriate pictures. A comparison of the results is shown in Table 7.3 where it will be noted that the listening results were much lower than the reading results for the first item and the results were very similar between reading and listening for the second item.

Understanding Instructions

This sub-test required that students understand spoken words and phrases to the extent that they were able to follow instructions such as 'Draw a cross on the picture of the apple'. If students were unable to perform tasks of this type they would not be able to function effectively in classrooms. The purpose was classroom and the context formal. Again it was expected that almost all students would reach the cutting score for this sub-test.

The 10-year-old students were asked to follow ten separate simple instructions and the 14-year-old students five only. In both cases virtually all students obtained a near maximum score and consequently the cutting scores which minimised classification errors were considerably below 80 per cent of items in the sub-tests as can be seen in Table 7.2.

The sub-test indicated that virtually all 10- and 14-year-old students in normal schooling were at least capable of understanding and following simple instructions necessary for formal functioning in classrooms.

Comprehending Passages

For this and the next sub-test students were asked to listen to a current affairs program and to answer questions based on the information presented. The program was 'The World We Live In' produced by the ABC for students in upper primary and junior secondary school. The specific tasks involved were:

1 Comprehending literal meaning
2 Comprehending implied meaning
3 Recalling and retaining facts
4 Recognizing repetition of the same idea in different words.

The program was interrupted a number of times so that questions could be asked and was then continued. In this way emphasis on memory was reduced. The context of this sub-test was formal and the purpose basically classroom although some items could be considered also as appropriate for citizenship purposes.

The same passage and 12-item sub-test was used for students at both age levels. Only 25 per cent of the 10-year-old students reached the required level, whereas 74 per cent of the 14-year-old students reached the level required of them. However, as errors were minimised at different cutting scores for the two age levels, ten items were required to be correct for the 10-year-old students and nine items for the 14-year-old students. The percentage of successful 14-year-old students would have been reduced to 56 per cent if they had been required to answer 10 items correctly. In either case there was a clear increase in the level of performance between the ages of 10 and 14 years on this sub-test. Further discussion of comparisons between the two age levels on common sub-tests is provided later in this chapter.

Comprehending Longer Passages

This sub-test was not administered to the 10-year-old students as field trials had indicated that it would be too difficult for them. The structure of the sub-test was essentially the same as the previous sub-test except that the passage was not interrupted. The 14-year-old students were asked to listen to a longer passage, lasting approximately three and one half minutes and then to answer five questions based on what they had heard.

The students were required to answer four or more of the five items correctly and 30 per cent of them achieved this level of performance. The passage was at a higher level of difficulty in terms of sentence structure than the earlier passage and required a much greater reliance on memory. Consequently it was not surprising that a much smaller proportion of students was able to reach the required level of performance.

When the items from the comprehending short and long passages sub-tests were totalled for the 14-year-old students, there were 17 items which could be said to form a more general passage comprehension sub-test. The cutting score for such a sub-test would be 13 items and 51 per cent of the 14-year-olds achieved this level. As expected this proportion was between the proportions of students who were successful on the two shorter sub-tests concerned with passage comprehension just discussed.

Comprehending Conversation

Students listened to a playlet and were asked a number of questions on it which required that the students were able to perform a wide range of interlocking tasks such as:

1 Recognizing stress patterns and sense groups
2 Comprehending probable meaning of a word
3 Identifying mood and recognizing changes in tone and mood
4 Recognizing appropriate intonation, expression, pitch, speaking rate, and emphasis
5 Comprehending implied meaning
6 Comprehending conversation in different situations
7 Making critical judgements
8 Recognizing emotive language and speaker's purpose
9 Discerning a speaker's probable intent when he uses sarcasm, irony or understatement
10 Determining relationships between speakers.

The context of the sub-test was relatively informal and the purpose would be personal or recreational.

The playlet for the 10-year-old students consisted of a conversation between a shopkeeper and a customer, and 65 per cent of the students reached the cutting score of four out of five items correct. A sixth item (item number four in Section D of the Listening Test) which had a negative discrimination index was deleted from this sub-test. The language of the stimulus material for this sub-test was more simple than the language used

Table 7.4 Proportion of Students Correct on Isolated Items Assessing Performance on Specific Listening Tasks

| Task | Percentage Correct | |
|---|---|---|
| | Age 10 | Age 14 |
| Comprehend probable meaning of a word | 79 | 82 |
| Identify relationships between (1) customer/shopkeeper | 45 | - |
| Identify relationships between (2) husband/wife | 97 | 99 |
| Recognize bias | 47 | 49 |
| Recognize sales pressure (1) Item E7 | 82 | 98 |
| Recognize sales pressure (2) Item E9 | 83 | 95 |
| Recognize mood | 87 | See sub-test |

in the previous sub-test for 10-year-olds, and this in part explains the higher percentage of students who achieved the required level. The less-formal social context of the stimulus was probably more familiar to many of the students than the current affairs passage which preceded it.

The playlet for the 14-year-old students was intended to be a typical family situation involving conversations between father and daughter and then mother and daughter. The recognition of intonation and mood was particularly important in this sub-test in which the way in which something was said was often more important than what was said. It was found that 88 per cent of the students answered correctly at least five of the seven items as required. Familiarity with the situation and the use of intonation would seem to have greatly assisted the 14-year-old students to recognize implied meaning in this context.

Two minor tasks that were incorporated into this sub-test were comprehending the probable meaning of a word and determining the relationships between speakers. For the first task the 10-year-olds were required to use the context of a passage to identify the probable meaning of 'exorbitant', a word chosen because few students knew its meaning out of context. When the word was placed in the context of a discussion between a shopkeeper and a customer, the probable meaning was correctly identified by 79 per cent of students. The word used in a similar way for the 14-year-old students was 'incarcerated'. In the particular family context in which it was used the correct meaning was identified by 82 per cent of students. Clearly context was most effective in aiding comprehension in both cases. The results for these items are included in Table 7.4.

For the other task of identifying the relationship between speakers, only one item was included in Section D, and this was at the 10-year-old level. From the greetings exchanged and the ensuing conversation, students were asked whether the shopkeeper and the customer were close friends, whether they knew each other slightly, whether they did not know each other at all, or whether there was no way of knowing their relationship. As only 45 per cent of the 10-year-olds correctly judged that they knew each other slightly and 42 per cent thought that they were close friends (in spite of the formality of the greetings exchanged), it would seem that this particular context was not effective in enabling the majority of students to identify the relationship between the two speakers. However one item in Section E (Item 3) where the students were asked to identify the intended audience depended upon an identification of a husband-wife relationship produced quite a different result. In that context the relationship was correctly identified by 97 per cent of the 10-year-olds and 99 per cent of the 14-year-old students. These results are also included in Table 7.4.

Comprehending in Different Situations

This sub-test, which was common to both age levels, consisted of ten statements each made in a different situation and the students were asked to identify the speaker's intended audience or purpose. Related tasks required that students recognized bias, sarcasm, irony or understatement and were able to determine a speaker's probable attitude and relative status. The context of the statements was largely informal and the purposes personal, business or citizenship.

The students were required to answer eight of the ten items correctly and 47 per cent of the 10-year-olds and 80 per cent of the 14-year-olds were able to do so. Again the older students were clearly superior to the younger students. This sub-test was then broken into two smaller sub-tests, Identifying Audience and Identifying Purpose, each of five items. The 10-year-old students were very much better at identifying the intended audience (82 per cent achieved the cutting score of 4 items correct), than at identifying the speaker's purpose (only 30 per cent reached the same cutting score). The 14-year-old students were also considerably better at identifying audience (96 per cent were successful) rather than purpose (51 per cent).

There were two other minor tasks that were assessed by means of one or two items. These were recognizing bias (Item 8 in Section E) and recognizing sales pressure (Items 7 and 9 in Section E). The results for these items are shown in Table 7.4 together with other minor tasks. The context in which the students were expected to recognize bias was one where a girl, apparently seeking a friend's opinion, was really wanting approval of her choice. For both age levels slightly less than half the students responded correctly. However when the students were expected to recognize sales pressure, many more were successful. More than four-fifths of the 10-year-olds and all except two to five per cent of the 14-year-old students identified the correct responses.

Comprehending Literal Meaning

As can be observed in Table 7.1, this sub-test was made up of appropriate items from Sections C and D of the test for 10-year-old students and suitable items were extracted from both parts of Section C for the 14 year-old students. Consequently although there was some overlap, the literal meaning sub-tests differed for the 10- and 14-year-old students with totals of 11 and 14 items respectively.

The proportion of 10-year-old students who achieved the cutting score of nine items correct for this sub-test was 27 per cent and the corresponding proportion of 14-year-old students who reached the cutting score of eleven was 43 per cent. This was one of the smaller proportions of 14-year-old students to reach the cutting score for any of the sub-tests.

Comprehending Implied Meaning

In both cases the items constituting these sub-tests came from Sections C and D of the listening tests and thus had different contexts. Whereas the Section C items were concerned with a current affairs program, the Section D items were related to more informal conversations. There was some overlap between the age levels with items four and nine from Section C being in both implied meaning sub-tests. Of the five items in the implied meaning sub-test for the 10-year-old students, three came from Section D which the students had found easier to answer. Similarly, of the six items in the implied meaning sub-test for the 14-year-old students, three were from Section D. As shown in Table 7.2, 59 per cent of the 10-year-olds and 88 per cent of the 14-year-olds reached the cutting scores set for these sub-tests. Clearly the fact that the tests were of different lengths but the cutting score was four items in both cases contributed to the difference in performance between the two age levels of students.

Making Critical Judgements

These sub-tests were made up of items from Sections D and E of the tests. Again contexts varied from conversations to statements made for a variety of purposes. In these cases identification of the correct answers depended upon the way in which something was said to a greater extent than what was actually said. Of the 14 items in the sub-test for the 10-year-old students, 12 items were required and 23 per cent of the sample students reached this level. The corresponding test for the 14-year-old students consisted of 17 items of which 13 were required and 85 per cent of students reached the required level. Although a large part of the difference in results would be accounted for by the different levels of the cutting scores which minimised errors, clearly the majority of the 10-year-old students found this to be a difficult task.

Recognizing Mood

This sub-test was applicable only to the 14-year-old students and was made up of four items from Section D. Once again the students performed quite well at this task with 89 per cent achieving the cutting score of three items correct out of four. In general the 14-year-olds performed much better on tasks where cues of intonation and mood were given compared with tasks where only literal interpretation of language used was possible.

The 10-year-olds were asked only one item which depended upon their recognition of mood from the tone of what was said. The correct response was given by 87 per cent, an incorrect response by 10 per cent and no response by 3 per cent of students (see Table 7.4 for a comparison of this result with other items). This relatively high proportion of correct responses suggests that the intonation of the utterance was effective in assisting the students to recognize mood and this result should be contrasted with the results for 10-year-old students on recognizing emotional language.

Recognizing Emotional Language

These sub-tests, constructed with items from Sections D and E, were concerned with recognizing emotional language, bias or prejudice, sales pressure or persuasion, propaganda and speaker's purpose. The sub-test for the 14-year-old students included the previous sub-test of recognizing mood but also included the recognition of other types of emotional language. Of the eight items in the sub-test for the 10-year-old students, seven items were required and 23 per cent achieved this score or higher. The

sub-test for 14-year-old students consisted of eleven items and 88 per cent of the students obtained the correct answers to at least eight of the items as required. In contrast to the 14-year-olds, the 10-year-old students performed no better on the task of recognizing emotional language than they did on tasks concerned solely with literal interpretation of language.

Literal Meaning Anchor Items

There were ten items which required the students to comprehend literal meaning and which were common to the tests for the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old students. The number of items required to be correct, or cutting score, which minimised classification errors was found to be eight items for both age levels. This level of performance was reached or surpassed by 32 per cent of the students aged 10 years and 62 per cent of the students aged 14 years.

Total Anchor Items

There was a total of 37 items common to both tests and the calculated cutting scores were 30 items and 29 items for the 10-year-old and 14-year old students respectively. These cutting scores identified 56 per cent of the 10-year-olds and 94 per cent of the 14-year-olds as successful on the sub-test.

When the method for permitting direct comparisons in performance between the two age levels described later in this chapter was used for this sub-test, it was calculated that 56 per cent of the 10-year-olds and 91 per cent of the 14-year-olds were successful, the respective proportions of students about whom we were undecided were only 12 per cent and 3 per cent, and the unsuccessful students were 32 per cent and 6 per cent of the total 10- and 14-year-old student samples. These proportions are also set out in Table 7.5.

The Total Tests

The listening assessment emphasis in this study was placed on student performance of specific tasks which depended upon particular logical definition of listening abilities. This was considered to be important because it was recognized that student achievement was very much related to the context of the task and of the student's purpose in performing it. Where deficiencies in student performance were revealed, it would also be helpful for remedial work if the specific ability a student did not possess were identified by the nature of the assessment. However student

performance on the test as a whole was of some interest as a means of summarising the various measures of listening performance over the range of tasks and abilities assessed.

There were 47 items in the test for 10-year-old students (after the removal of one item as discussed previously) and the cutting score, calculated in the same way as was done for each sub-test, was found to be 38 items correct. This result was achieved or surpassed by 62 per cent of the 10-year-old students. The length of the total test when compared with the much shorter sub-tests had the advantage that there were fewer student results clustered around the cutting score and the reliability of the successful/unsuccessful classification made would be relatively high. If the cutting score were reduced by one score point, an additional eight per cent of students would have been considered as successful on the test as a whole. However such a change would considerably increase the proportion of students who reached the new cutting score when they had a low probability of having reached the 80 per cent criterion level.

The total test for the 14-year-old students consisted of 49 items and 39 items were required to be answered correctly by students classified as successful on the test as a whole. The cutting score or higher was achieved by 79 per cent of the 14-year-old students with eight per cent scoring exactly 39, the cutting score. Thus the proportion of successful students would have been reduced by eight per cent if the cutting score had been raised one score point. It should be remembered that it was the skew of the total test distribution that effectively caused the cutting score for this test to be 39 not 40 items correct and that increasing the cutting score would increase the proportion of students who failed to reach the new cutting score when there was a high probability that they had attained the 80 per cent criterion level for the test.

Comparison in Performance Between the Two Age Levels

The cutting score for the literal meaning anchor items sub-test was the same for both age levels, so a direct comparison may be made between the results for 10-year-old and 14-year-old students. Unfortunately this was not the case for the other two sub-tests which were common to both listening tests. The problem of different levels of performance required becomes crucial when the major purpose of such a sub-test was the comparison of results between the two samples of students. The cutting scores for the comprehending passages and total anchor items sub-tests differed by one score

Table 7.5 Comparison of Students' Results for the Common Sub-tests

| Sub-test | No. of Items | No. Items Required | | % Students Successful | | 10 y.o.%[a] | | | 14 y.o.%[a] | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 10 y.o. | 14 y.o. | 10 y.o. | 14 y.o. | S | ? | U | S | ? | U |
| Literal Meaning Anchor Items | 10 | 8 | 8 | 32 | 62 | 32 | - | 68 | 62 | - | 38 |
| Comprehending Passages | 12 | 10 | 9 | 25 | 74 | 25 | 20 | 55 | 56 | 18 | 26 |
| Total Anchor Items | 37 | 30 | 29 | 56 | 94 | 56 | 12 | 32 | 91 | 3 | 6 |

a S = Successful, ? = Undecided, U = Unsuccessful.

point as a result of the different degrees of skew that characterised the distributions. In each case the cutting scores minimised classification errors so there was no rationale for choosing one cutting score over the other in order to make a comparison between the results for the two age levels of students. Consequently it would seem that, for the purposes of comparison, the higher cutting score should be taken as the point which distinguished the successful students at the upper end of the scale, and the lower cutting score should be taken as the point below which the unsuccessful students were distinguished at the lower end of the scale. Those students who achieved exactly the lower cutting score thus fall into a 'grey area' where the best we can say is that we are undecided as to whether the students were able to meet the criterion level set, that is whether their true score exceeded 0.80. The proportions of students in the three categories for the three common sub-tests are shown in Table 7.5 where it can be observed that there were up to one fifth of each age level in the undecided category for the comprehending passages sub-test, but much smaller proportions of students in this category for the total anchor items sub-test. Overall there were approximately twice as many 14-year-olds as there were 10-year-olds in the successful category on the sub-tests common to both age levels.

## Summary

The listening tests covered as wide a range of abilities, contexts and purposes as possible given the restrictions of time and a group test situation. In particular emphasis was placed on assessing student abilities by means of a series of sub-tests because it was abilities that could most likely be directly affected by emphases in school programs.

The proportion of students who reached or surpassed a pre-determined level of performance or cutting score for each sub-test was used to summarise student performance on each ability assessed. Cutting scores were calculated on the basis that students should be able to answer correctly 80 per cent of all possible items which could be used to assess the students' ability at that level. The use of the 80 per cent criterion level meant that results on the listening tests would be comparable with those of the Australian Studies in School Performance project.

There was considerable variation in the proportions of students who were successful on the various tasks assessed by the listening tests for the 10- and 14-year-old students. For the 10-year-olds the proportions of successful students ranged from 23 per cent for the making critical judgements and recognizing emotional language sub-tests to 100 per cent for understanding instructions with most of the remaining sub-tests in the range of 45 to 65 per cent of successful students. If the total test result were taken as a summary of student performance on the listening test, 62 per cent of 10-year-old students would be considered to have reached the criterion of an 80 per cent performance level.

When the range of performance of the 14-year-old students was considered, it was found that the comprehending longer passages sub-test had only 30 per cent of students successful and both the comprehending words and statements and understanding instructions sub-tests had 100 per cent successful students. The majority of sub-tests had from 75 to 90 per cent of successful students and the total test had 79 per cent of students who met the 80 per cent criterion level of performance.

When direct comparisons were made between the two age groups, it was found that approximately 30 per cent more of the 14-year-old students were successful when compared with the 10-year-old students and approximately 30 per cent fewer were unsuccessful. There were varying proportions of students in the undecided group where differences existed between the cutting scores for the two age levels.

CHAPTER EIGHT

# SPEAKING TEST RESULTS

## The Assessments Made

The Speaking Tests at both age levels attempted to cover as wide as possible a range of speaking tasks identified as important in Chapter Four. The major tasks assessed are listed below:

1 Stating personal details
2 Describing objects
3 Giving directions
4 Sequencing and organizing ideas
5 Reading aloud
6 Speaking expressively
7 Repeating a story in own words
8 Telling a story
9 Stating literal meaning
10 Giving opinions
11 Conversing in different situations.

It will be noted that a range of different types of assessment would be desirable for such a range of tasks and a number of different assessments were made. The assessments were made by teachers with experience at the primary level for the 10-year-old students and the secondary level for the 14-year-old students.

The time-consuming and therefore expensive process of scoring the tapes containing the Speaking Test responses meant that only a small number of the 1300 students' responses at each age level could be re-scored to check examiner reliability. The Speaking Tests of 100 students at each age level were selected at random and were re-scored by the same marker and by different markers. The proportion of agreements between markers on the 100 tapes was taken as the measure of reliability for each assessment made.

The two major types of assessment used were criterion-referenced measures of adequacy and normative measures of fluency of response. The criteria used in assessing adequacy and fluency are described below in some detail. Assessments of expressiveness and confidence were also made with varying degrees of success. Expressiveness was scored on a five-point normative scale for two test items, reading aloud and supplying conversation,

Table 8.1 Student Confidence as Assessed by the Speaking Test Administrator

| Degree of Student Confidence | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| Generally confident | 628 | 48 | 587 | 45 |
| Hesitant at first but confident later | 244 | 19 | 289 | 22 |
| Variable depending on the type of task | 188 | 15 | 192 | 15 |
| Generally somewhat lacking in confidence | 135 | 10 | 148 | 11 |
| Not confident at all | 26 | 2 | 31 | 2 |
| Missing data | 78 | 6 | 56 | 4 |
| Totals | 1299 | 100 | 1303 | 100 |

but these measures were found to be among those which had low between-marker consistency and were dropped from further consideration. The degree of confidence with which each student approached the speaking test was measured by means of a subjective assessment of the teacher administering the test. The results of this assessment are shown in Table 8.1. The table indicates that after the initial items, more than two-thirds of the students approached each task confidently and only a small proportion lacked confidence to a marked degree. Student confidence in relation to achievement will be considered further in Chapter Nine.

The Assessment of Adequacy

The adequacy of a student's response in the Speaking Test was assessed in terms of whether it could have constituted a successful communication. In order to be judged as being a successful piece of speaking, a response needed to be relevant to the question asked and it needed to be coherent enough to be capable of being understood by a reasonable person listening to it. Four categories of adequacy were proposed as follows:

Category 4 - Adequate +. More than met requirements in that it was very cogent and coherent, or it showed good control of spoken language or it showed insight.

Category 3 - Adequate. Met requirements in that it was coherent enough for the meaning of what was said to be understood by the listener.

Category 2 - Not adequate. The spoken communication was unlikely to be successful in conveying the meaning intended because it lacked coherence or was not fully appropriate to the question asked.

Category 1 - Very inadequate. The spoken communication was most inadequate in that it lacked coherence to the degree that all or almost all meaning was lost, or it was quite inappropriate as a response to the question or, in the case of a greeting (Item 8), was omitted altogether.

Thus it was expected that each student would be assessed against the specific requirements of each speaking task. The assessment of adequacy for each student was criterion-referenced and did not depend upon the performance of other individual students or of the group.

When the samples of 100 tapes at each age level were re-scored by the same marker and by a different marker the number of disagreements was quite high, particularly between categories 3 and 4. It had also been noted that very few responses had been scored as category 1, either in the original marking or the re-marking. Thus the major interest was centred on the distinction between a score of two and scores of three or four. Consequently the four categories were collapsed into two categories, adequate (categories 3 and 4) and not adequate (categories 1 and 2). For most items the level of agreement on the sample tapes when only the two categories were considered was in excess of 80 per cent, that is two different markers agreed on an adequate/not adequate classification for at least 80 of the 100 tapes. Agreement for the same marker on different occasions was higher again. The lower bound of acceptability of level of agreement was taken to be 70 per cent. Such a requirement excluded six of the 25 adequacy measures from further consideration at the 10-year-old level, and six of the 30 measures at the 14-year-old level.

## The Assessment of Fluency

The fluency of a student's response was assessed for most items in the Speaking Test and was indicated by the rate of articulation and the extent to which a continuous flow of speech was produced without excessive hesitation or slowness, that is pace, pause and rhythm of speech should have been appropriate. The markers were asked to make a global assessment of fluency based on the above definition and, where fluency varied between different responses within an item, markers were asked to score the best response. The markers were also asked to use a five-point normal distribution when awarding a score as follows:

Category 5 - top 10 per cent,

Category 4 - next 20 per cent,

Category 3 - middle 40 per cent,
Category 2 - next 20 per cent,
Category 1 - lowest 10 per cent of students.

For a number of items, especially in the early part of the test, many students did not produce enough speech for a reliable fluency assessment to be made and these assessments were not considered further.

There were a number of measures of reading fluency, and of fluency-when-giving-opinions that were made at both age levels. When a correlation matrix of all fluency measures was prepared there were clearly two levels of correlations present. In general correlations between the fluency measures were of the order of 0.2 to 0.5 at the 10-year-old level and 0.3 to 0.6 at the 14-year-old level. The difference between age groups suggested that the fluency of the 10-year-olds tended to be more task dependent than that of the 14-year-olds. However correlations between the various measures of reading fluency and those between the different measures of fluency-when-giving-opinions were of the order of 0.7 at both age levels. For reasons of economy only the New South Wales samples were used when these correlations were calculated, there being no reason to suspect that the correlations for the other State or Territory samples would differ from those calculated for New South Wales. The ranges of correlation for students from New South Wales are shown in Table 8.2 where the product-moment correlation coefficients for the fluency measures are given. In the table decimal points have been omitted. Correlations for the 10-year-olds are above the diagonal while those for the 14-year-olds are below the diagonal. Correlations in the area of 0.7 have been underlined.

The relationships between the measures of fluency obtained are quite clear: the different reading fluency measures were much more highly related to each other than to any other fluency measures, and the same was true of the fluency-when-giving-opinion measures. Consequently each of these two groups of consistent fluency measures were coalesced into one composite measure by adding scores for the components and re-scaling onto a five-point normative scale. These composite measures are used when adequacy and fluency measures are related later in this chapter.

## Speaking Test Results

The results presented in this chapter are those for Australian students overall. That is, results for each State and Territory have been weighted

Table 8.2 Product Moment Correlation Coefficients Between Fluency Measures in the Speaking Tests for 10- and 14-Year-Old Students in NSW

| Fluency Measure 14-Year-Olds | 10-Year-Olds[a] 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.Describing objects | | 26 | 43 | 24 | 25 | 25 | 13 | 32 | 14 | 32 | . | . | 20 |
| 2.Giving directions | 32 | | 37 | 21 | 33 | 37 | 15 | 30 | 11 | 26 | . | . | 35 |
| 3.Sequencing | 40 | 48 | | 32 | 43 | 47 | 22 | 41 | 22 | 45 | . | . | 42 |
| 4.Reading aloud A. | 26 | 37 | 39 | | 21 | 24 | 72 | 38 | 68 | 35 | . | . | 35 |
| 5.Repeating a story | 41 | 39 | 43 | 55 | | 42 | 18 | 37 | 14 | 38 | . | . | 29 |
| 6.Telling a story | 29 | 38 | 48 | 48 | 44 | | 20 | 45 | 10 | 44 | . | . | 55 |
| 7.Reading aloud B. | 32 | 40 | 41 | 69 | 48 | 51 | | 28 | 78 | 25 | . | . | 33 |
| 8.Giving opinion A. | 41 | 44 | 47 | 43 | 46 | 53 | 54 | | 33 | 70 | . | . | 48 |
| 9.Reading aloud C. | 32 | 37 | 42 | 69 | 47 | 45 | 70 | 54 | | 32 | . | . | 37 |
| 10.Giving opinion B. | 49 | 42 | 52 | 57 | 54 | 53 | 56 | 67 | 57 | | . | . | 45 |
| 11.Reading aloud D. | 31 | 41 | 43 | 68 | 53 | 43 | 69 | 55 | 71 | 58 | | . | . |
| 12.Giving opinion C. | 44 | 44 | 45 | 50 | 51 | 45 | 54 | 72 | 50 | 70 | 56 | | . |
| 13.Conversing | 42 | 41 | 50 | 51 | 56 | 49 | 56 | 58 | 53 | 63 | 57 | 65 | |

Numbers of Students: $N_{10}$ = 208, $N_{14}$ = 221

a The Speaking Test for the 10-year-old students did not have the fluency measures numbered 11 and 12.

as appropriate for the sample sizes obtained and for the populations of 10- and 14-year-old students in each State or Territory. The results for each of the assessments which had an acceptable level of agreement between markers (70 per cent agreement) are shown in Tables 8.3 and 8.4 and are discussed below. The actual items of the Speaking Tests referred to throughout this chapter may be inspected in Appendix Six where the interview schedule giving an outline of the whole test has been reproduced.

## Stating Personal Details

At the beginning of the Speaking Test students were asked a number of questions which required them to give their full name, address including postcode, telephone number, date and country of birth, languages spoken in the home, family size, father's and mother's occupations and a brief description of their home. The purpose of these questions was threefold.

Table 8.3 Results for Providing Personal Details in the Speaking Test in 1978 Compared with Form Completion in a Writing Test in 1975

| Sub-task[a] Giving: | Speaking Test Students Correct | | Writing Test Students Correct[d] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Age 10 % | Age 14 % | Age 10 % | Age 14 % |
| Full name | 100 | 99 | Surname 92<br>First name 87 | 99<br>97 |
| Address | 96 | 96 | 81 | 97 |
| Postcode | 84 | 96 | 93 | 97 |
| Telephone No.[b] | 97 | 96 | Not asked | |
| Date of Birth | 78 | 97 | 60 | 96 |
| Country of Birth[c] | 85 | 95 | 87 | 95 |

a Missing data have been eliminated.
b Calculated as a proportion of those who stated they had the telephone on at home. Approximately four fifths of students when asked this question stated that they did have a telephone.
c Almost all the incorrect responses to this question resulted from students giving a State of Australia as country of birth.
d Extracted from Keeves and Bourke (1976:72).

The questions provided an easy introduction to a relatively unfamiliar situation where an individual student was being interviewed by an adult, normally a teacher, with a tape recorder. It was anticipated that virtually all students would be able to respond to most of these questions but when a student could not do so, the interviewer had been asked to say 'That's all right, I'll look it up later' or something similarly reassuring to show that there were no penalties for not knowing an answer in this situation. Secondly, some of the questions provided background information on the student which might be useful in interpreting his performance on the tests. Finally, being able to state personal details of the type requested had been identified as one of the important speaking tasks for assessment. Thus this section of the test became an assessment of stating personal details which in everyday life is frequently an alternative to filling in a form for an educational institution, business or government agency. The results on the most common items of this type are presented in Table 8.3 where the results are compared with the same items on the form completion section of the Writing Tests used in the Australian Studies in School Performance in 1975 (Keeves and Bourke, 1976:72). When the context and purpose dimensions of the framework developed in Chapter Four are considered

the context of this task would normally be formal and the purposes in doing it could be related to business or citizenship.

For the 14-year-old students the Speaking Test results on giving personal details were almost identical with the corresponding Writing Test results. Virtually all the students at both age levels were able to state their full name as requested in the Speaking Test. There were no other terms such as surname and first name used as it would appear that these terms had been unfamiliar to some 10-year-olds in 1975. Other results for the 10-year-old students were more variable between 1975 and 1978. Although much higher proportions gave their address and date of birth orally, a smaller proportion gave their postcode. As might be anticipated the major problem in giving date of birth by the 10-year-olds was in knowing the year in which they were born. Almost the same proportions gave country of birth correctly in 1975 and 1978 with the major error being State of Australia given in place of Australia by approximately 15 per cent of students. In general most students were able to provide personal details adequately.

Describing Objects

Both groups of students were asked to describe two objects, one which was not present (a window of their house) and one which was present (a drawing of a box of matches). Almost the complete range of context and purpose could be encompassed by such tasks. Only the assessment made of the 14-year-old students' responses when describing a window were reliable enough to be reported here. The other measures will be reported for samples of students in Chapter Ten, after re-scoring. It will be noted in Table 8.4 that only 57 per cent of the 14-year-old students gave an adequate response to this item and this was one of the lowest results for the Speaking Test. The usefulness of being able to describe orally a familiar object that is not present suggests that this task could receive greater emphasis in schools' oral language development programs.

Giving Directions

The 10-year-old students were asked to do two tasks in this item, both of which differed from the task presented to the 14-year-olds. The first task for the students aged 10 years presented a drawing of a park area between a school and a house and the students were asked to tell the interviewer the best way to get from the school to the house. An adequate description which could be followed to reach the house from the school was given by

Table 8.4 Proportions of Adequate Responses and Between-Marker Agreement on Speaking Tasks

| Task | Adequate % | | Agreement % | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Age 10 | Age 14 | Age 10 | Age 14 |
| Describing Objects Object not present | - | 57 | - | 84 |
| Giving directions | | | | |
| 1. Directions not provided | 72 | 64 | 96 | 76 |
| 2. Directions provided | 82 | - | 74 | - |
| Sequencing | | | | |
| *1. Listing facts in order | 99 | 99 | 100 | 99 |
| *2. Organizing ideas | 95 | 98 | 98 | 98 |
| *Repeating a story in own words | 87 | 92 | 92 | 87 |
| Telling a story from a picture sequence | 97 | 97 | 98 | 98 |
| Giving opinions A | | | | |
| *1. Repeating an idea in own words | 46 | 72 | 91 | 82 |
| *2. Making critical judgements | 63 | 84 | 74 | 82 |
| *3. Giving own ideas | 85 | 95 | 86 | 93 |
| Giving opinions B | | | | |
| 1. Repeating an idea in own words | 73 | 66 | 70 | 77 |
| 2. Making critical judgements | 68 | 86 | 83 | 88 |
| 3. Giving own ideas A | 61 | 80 | 87 | 78 |
| 4. Giving own ideas B | - | 82 | - | 90 |
| Giving opinions C | | | | |
| 1. Repeating an idea in own words | - | 40 | - | 88 |
| 2. Making critical judgements | - | 87 | - | 75 |
| 3. Giving own ideas A | - | 91 | - | 88 |
| 4. Giving own ideas B | - | 82 | - | 87 |
| Conversing | | | | |
| 1. Giving information A | 97 | 60 | 98 | 90 |
| 2. Giving information B | - | 96 | - | 98 |
| *3. Giving a message A | 80 | 71 | 86 | 87 |
| 4. Giving a message B | 96 | - | 94 | - |
| 5. Requesting information | 99 | 45 | 99 | 87 |
| 6. Greeting an adult | 71 | - | 93 | - |
| 7. Seeking employment | - | 53 | - | 82 |

* An asterisk indicates a task that was identical for both age levels.

72 per cent of the students. The second task for the 10-year-olds used the same drawing but had a dotted line between the school and the house showing a path around, over, under or through various obstacles and the students were asked to explain these directions to a friend who wanted to go that way. (As with all speaking tasks, the diagrams can be seen in Appendix Six.) It was found that 82 per cent of the students provided an adequate description when these directions were provided. At least eight directions were required in sequence stating the action and the object (for example, through the log) out of approximately 18 distinct directions which could have been given. Both tasks were fairly informal and the purposes could be personal or recreational. Whereas the first task required more invention by the students, the second task was the more interesting. Both of these facts would tend to make the second task more likely than the first task to be done well and this proved to be the case.

The task for the 14-year-old students was more formal in that a street map showing the area between a school and a house was used instead of a drawing of a park as had been used for the 10-year-olds. The purpose a student would normally have in performing the task of giving directions without pointing to the map would be personal or recreational. Any directions that could be followed, whether street names were used or not, were accepted as adequate. At cross streets students were required to indicate whether a turn should be left or right but at the two 'T' intersections where this was unnecessary only an indication of turning into the street was required. At least five directions were necessary and 64 per cent of the 14-year-olds were able to perform this task successfully. In 1975 students had been asked to write directions for a very similar (but not identical) task, and 52 per cent were successful (Bourke and Lewis, 1976: 5.37-5.38). As might be expected, a much higher proportion of students could perform the oral task which was the more commonly experienced situation.

Sequencing

The 10- and 14-year-old students were asked to look at four pictures which were out of sequence and to list them in the correct order giving the reasons for their choice of order. Any sensible order was acceptable provided the students could give reasons for their sequence. The students at both age levels were presented with the same two sets of pictures, and almost all students gave the sequence intended rather than any other.

Although the task was a classroom-based, relatively formal one, the students seemed to enjoy doing it, and this was particularly true of the 10-year-olds. Two measures of adequacy were made for each set of pictures - whether the student could list facts in an appropriate order and whether he could organize, develop and present ideas as reasons for his sequence. The mean proportions of students for the two sets of pictures were calculated for listing facts and for organizing ideas but it was the latter measure that was of major interest. Almost all students, 99 per cent of both the 10- and 14-year-olds, were able to list the facts adequately, and in almost every case the 14-year-old students were able to give adequate reasons for their choice. A larger proportion of 10-year-olds was unable to give adequate reasons but, on the whole, the task was very well done with 95 per cent being rated as adequate at organizing, developing and presenting ideas in this context.

Repeating a Story

This task was included in the item which also required the student to read part of a story aloud and to answer some questions about the story. Information on the reading and other aspects of the item will be given later in this chapter. After the student had read a number of pages from the book 'A Fly Went By', he was asked to explain what the story was about up to that point. Students at both age levels were given the same task which was considered to be a formal classroom task. An adequate explanation of the story could have been given by a brief description of the events portrayed to that point or by a few insightful comments which summarized the essence of the story. Some students did summarize the story rather than provide a literal description of the events. These students in general showed considerable insight into the story and frequently said something like; 'the story shows that people are often afraid without reason because they do not understand what is happening'. Overall an adequate response was given by 87 per cent of students aged 10 years and 92 per cent of those aged 14 years. Although the story itself was a simple one to repeat in literal terms, this result was also considered to be a very good one at both age levels.

Telling a Story

The students were given a sequence of pictures as a stimulus and were asked to tell a story based on the pictures, although it was not necessary to mention every picture separately. The tasks had an informal context and the purpose could have been personal, recreational or classroom based.

Although the same task was used at both age levels, the stimulus material was different with the 14-year-old group being presented with a slightly more complex sequence, possibly closer to their interests. It was found that very few students at either age level were unable to complete adequately the task of telling a story based on the pictures as 97 per cent of both the 10- and 14-year-old students were considered to have been successful.

Associated with this task, the students were asked to provide conversation appropriate to some of the pictures. The results for this task are reported later in this chapter.

Giving Opinions

The students were given a short paragraph of some 40 to 50 words to read and were then asked to repeat the idea expressed in their own words, to make a critical judgement of what was read, and to organize, develop and present their own ideas in response to a related question. The 10-year-old students were given two separate topics, one of which was also used in the test for the 14-year-old students. The 14-year-olds were given three topics. The context of this item was formal and the purpose was largely classroom based. Each student's ability to read the paragraphs was assessed and the results are reported later in this chapter. Where a student needed help in reading the passages he was then given assistance because his ability to answer some of the subsequent questions depended, in part, on his knowing what the passages stated.

The topic that was common to both age levels concerned 'getting on with parents' because it was considered to be relevant for both groups of students. The 10-year-old students in particular had some difficulty in distinguishing between repeating the ideas in the statement in their own words and making their own comments on the statement. Consequently in some cases students mixed their ideas with those in the statement and this was accepted. However where students entirely omitted mention of the ideas in the statement, their answer to the first question where they were specifically asked to re-state the ideas was considered to be inadequate. It will be noted in Table 8.4 that the 14-year-olds did much better than the 10-year-olds on the common task. On this topic both groups of students were best at organizing, developing and presenting their own ideas and worst at repeating another person's ideas in their own words.

The other topic for the 10-year-olds was related to 'children's bedtimes' and the students were much better at repeating the idea with almost three-quarters giving an adequate response compared with less than a half for the other topic. Only slightly more students than for the other topic (68 compared with 63 per cent) made an acceptable critical judgement but a very much lower proportion (61 per cent) were able to organize, develop and present their own ideas on this topic (85 per cent previously). For the two topics used at the 10-year-old level the performance of the total group of students was quite variable on two of the three measures made.

The results for the 14-year-olds were more consistent on two of the three topics they were asked to consider. In addition to the topic 'getting on with parents' already discussed, they were presented with topics on 'age of leaving school' and 'pop music'. With the exception of repeating the idea on the pop music topic for which only 40 per cent of the 14-year-old students were successful, the majority of students gave adequate responses to the questions asked. Details of the proportions of correct responses are shown in Table 8.4 but, in general, approximately 70 per cent of the 14-year-olds were able to repeat the ideas expressed in two of the topics in their own words, more than 80 per cent made appropriate critical judgements about the statements and from 82 to 95 per cent (depending on the topic) demonstrated that they could organize, develop and present their own ideas in this context.

Conversing

The major tasks that were assessed in this section of the Speaking Tests were giving and requesting information, greeting people and giving a message. Different situations were suggested and set up by means of sequences of four pictures with explanations and questions read out by the test administrator. The 10-year-old students had three sequences presented to them and the 14-year-olds had four sequences. The students were expected to provide direct speech in answering the questions. The contexts varied from formal to informal and the purposes ranged across all five categories identified. A number of the measures made in this section had low agreement between markers and these measures were abandoned. However the results presented below had very high levels of agreement as can be confirmed by consulting Table 8.4.

One sequence where a boy was shown telephoning a friend to make an appointment and subsequently to leave a message, was common to the tests

at both age levels. The message to be left for the friend with the friend's mother involved changing the time for their appointment. It is of interest that this was the only identical task which more 10 than 14-year-olds completed successfully with 80 per cent leaving an adequate message compared with 71 per cent of the older students. The 10-year-old students were asked in another sequence to give a message from their class teacher to the school principal. In this situation which was probably more familiar 96 per cent of the students conveyed an adequate message.

In another situation the 10-year-old students needed to ask the location of milk in a supermarket from a friend of their mother who they had met in the shop. On finding they did not have enough money, they returned home to tell their mother what had happened. For the tasks of requesting and giving information in these contexts almost all the 10-year-olds performed adequately with 97 and 99 per cent respectively being considered to be successful. Using appropriate greetings was another task which was identified in Chapter Four as being important and the greeting made to the friend of their mother in this sequence was used to assess this task. The students had been specifically informed in the example sequence given that a greeting was required and a greeting had also been asked for in the text of the question read out to them. It was found that 71 per cent of the 10-year-olds gave an appropriate greeting in this context.

The 14-year-old students were presented with different situations in which they were required to give and request information. For giving information the context varied from giving information to a police officer about a car accident they had witnessed, to explaining to the school principal why they were late. It is not surprising that whereas only 60 per cent of the students could perform the first, probably unfamiliar task adequately, 96 per cent could perform the much more familiar task of explaining lateness in arrival at school. Two other tasks for the 14-year-old students involved requesting information on the telephone about a bicycle that had been advertised for sale, and seeking a part-time job in a supermarket. For the item related to the bicycle, some establishment of reasons for telephoning plus at least two questions about the bicycle were required for adequacy but these requirements were met by only 45 per cent of students. In seeking part-time employment, the students were required simply to make some sort of request for a part-time job by mentioning times when they were available or any other indication of what was being

Table 8.5 Reading Errors (Including Prompts) Made by 10-Year-Old and 14-Year-Old Students

| No. of Errors | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| None | 62 | 5 | 48 | 4 |
| 1 - 3 | 269 | 21 | 255 | 20 |
| 4 - 7 | 464 | 36 | 434 | 33 |
| 8 - 15 | 399 | 31 | 456 | 35 |
| 16 or more | 53 | 4 | 77 | 6 |
| Missing data[a] | 52 | 4 | 33 | 3 |
| No. of Students | 1299 | | 1303 | |

a Most of the missing data arise from students who completed the Listening and Word Knowledge Tests but who did not attempt the Speaking Test at all.

requested. This task was handled successfully by 53 per cent of the 14-year-old students. It would seem that neither of these tasks was familiar to many students. In 1975 a different item required that students write an application for a job and 50 per cent of 14-year-olds were able to complete the task successfully (Bourke and Lewis, 1976:5.27, 5.28). Although the item used in 1975 might seem to be much more demanding in the criteria that were required for a successful response, the closeness of the results between 1975 and 1978 is interesting.

Results of Other Assessments of Adequacy

In addition to the results already described the students at both age levels were assessed on reading adequacy, supplying literal meaning of what was read, and supplying conversation for a story that had been invented from a pictorial stimulus. Each of these assessments is now considered in turn.

Reading Adequacy. Reading adequacy was assessed by totalling the numbers of errors made and prompts given throughout the three reading tasks designed for the 10-year-old students and the four tasks for the 14-year-olds. Care was taken not to count any one reading problem as both an error and a prompt. In fact very few prompts were necessary. When these errors were totalled there was a maximum of 84 errors for the 10-year-olds and 60 errors for the 14-year-olds, with by far the majority of students making between four and fifteen errors. The numbers of errors (including prompts)

Table 8.6 Proportions of Adequate Responses to Supplying Literal Meaning and Conversation by 10-Year-Old and 14-Year-Old Students

| No. of Adequate Responses[a] | Literal Meaning | | Supplying Conversation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Age 10 % | Age 14 % | Age 10 % | Age 14 % |
| 0 | 2 | 1 | - | 1 |
| 1 | 13 | 10 | 2 | 4 |
| 2 | 32 | 33 | 18 | 15 |
| 3 | 54 | 55 | 84 | 87 |

a Missing data have been excluded.

were grouped into five categories and the proportions of students in each category are shown in Table 8.5. It should be noted that the 10-year-old students were asked to read 319 words and the 14-year-olds read 270 of the same words plus 87 other words, making a total of 357 words. It would seem that the distribution of errors shown in Table 8.5 represents a high level of reading proficiency, especially as the students were reading aloud. In particular it will be noted that the 10-year-olds performed as well as the 14-year-olds after allowing for the different number of words read by the two groups. Only the small proportions of students who made more than 16 errors could be said to be reading so poorly that meaning was in danger of being lost.

Supplying Literal Meaning. The 10- and 14-year-old students were asked the literal meanings of the same three phrases they had read in the story 'A Fly Went By'. The phrases were:

1 shook with fear
2 That frog is after me.
3 Do not pick on the frog like that.

The key words that were repeated when the questions were asked have been underlined. The results indicated that there was little difference between the two age levels in being able to supply literal meaning for phrases such as these, and that more than four-fifths of the students were able to respond adequately to at least two of the phrases. At the other end of the scale only two per cent of the 10-year-olds and one per cent of the 14-year-olds were unable to give the correct literal meaning for any of the phrases. The distributions of these results are shown in Table 8.6.

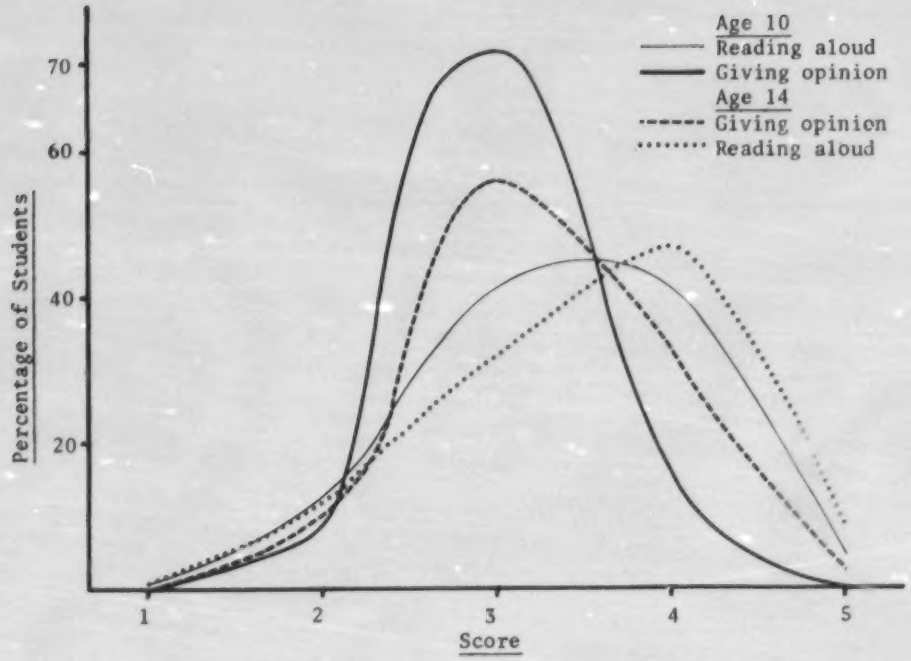



Figure 8.1. Distributions of Overall Measures of Reading-Aloud Fluency and Fluency-When-Giving-Opinions for 10 & 14-Year-Old Students.

Supplying Conversation. The 10- and 14-year-old students were asked to tell a story based on pictorial stimulus material. Different stimulus material was used for the two age levels but in each case the students were asked to supply three items of conversation appropriate to the story. Where it was necessary the students were prompted to provide direct speech. The actual pictures and conversation sought may be inspected in Appendix Six. It can be seen in Table 8.6 that the majority of both groups of students were able to provide appropriate conversation for all three items requested. More than four-fifths of the students had all three items scored as adequate, very small proportions made only one adequate response and less than one per cent failed to provide any adequate conversation.

## Results of Fluency Assessments

The fluency assessments reported here are the sums of the measures recorded for reading aloud and for giving opinions. The sums have been recoded onto a five-point scale, and the distributions for both measures for the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old students are shown in Figure 8.1. The distributions were all negatively skewed to some extent but, at both

Table 8.7 Proportions of Students Giving an Adequate Response by Fluency Category for Reading Aloud and Giving Opinions

| Task Assessed: Proportion Adequate[a] | Total Sample % | Reading aloud: Fluency | | | Giving opinions: Fluency | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | L% | M% | H% | L% | M% | H% |
| 10-Year-Old Students | | | | | | | |
| Giving directions | 72 | 47 | 71 | 80 | 44 | 74 | 80 |
| Giving a message | 80 | 67 | 78 | 87 | 63 | 81 | 90 |
| Repeating ideas | 46 | 35 | 42 | 54 | 38 | 43 | 66 |
| Making critical judgements | 63 | 35 | 58 | 75 | 27 | 63 | 85 |
| Giving own ideas | 85 | 62 | 84 | 92 | 51 | 86 | 96 |
| 14-Year-Old Students | | | | | | | |
| Giving directions | 64 | 46 | 60 | 71 | 44 | 64 | 71 |
| Giving a message | 71 | 70 | 70 | 72 | 63 | 71 | 73 |
| Repeating ideas | 72 | 63 | 69 | 77 | 63 | 69 | 80 |
| Making critical judgements | 84 | 6[illegible] | 80 | 91 | 53 | 83 | 95 |
| Giving own ideas | 95 | 83 | 95 | 98 | 79 | 95 | 100 |

a Missing data have been excluded.

age levels, the distributions for reading aloud were more skewed than the distributions for giving opinions. The variation in scores awarded for giving opinion was less than that for reading aloud, especially at the 10-year-old level, as can be seen by the high peaks of the distributions at a score of three. It would seem that the type of responses students made when giving opinions may not have allowed very much scope for differences in fluency capabilities to become apparent. Alternatively perhaps fluency for these items was very dependent upon other characteristics of students' answers such as adequacy and, although there were differences in levels of fluency in the responses, the markers were not always able to recognize the differences while they were concentrating on the adequacy of responses. As stated earlier, for reasons of economy markers were scoring for adequacy and fluency at the same time. It is reasonable to expect that there would be a relationship between measures of adequacy and fluency for the same responses, but it would also be hoped that, to some extent, assessments of adequacy and fluency would take different characteristics of responses into consideration and would

therefore differ somewhat. Consequently there should be some cases where a student was assessed as having provided an adequate response without being fluent, and vice versa.

When two fluency assessments made for each student (reading aloud and giving opinions) were compared with a number of adequacy assessments (giving directions, giving a message, repeating an idea, expressing critical judgements and giving own ideas), the relationships between fluency and adequacy varied considerably. The relationships were very high between both fluency assessments and expressing critical judgements and giving own ideas, particularly for the 10-year-old students. The relationships were quite low at both age levels for repeating ideas, especially for reading-aloud fluency. At the 14-year-old level there were low relationships between both fluency assessments and giving a message. The relationships are shown in Table 8.7 where the proportions of students who made adequate responses are shown for different fluency categories. Because of the small numbers of students in some categories, fluency assessments of 1 and 2 have been grouped into a low fluency category (L) and fluency assessments of 4 and 5 have been grouped into a high fluency category (H). Fluency assessments of 3 are shown in the table as moderate fluency (M). The relationships between fluency-when-giving-opinion and adequacy of responses when repeating ideas, making critical judgements and giving own ideas are of particular interest because the latter responses were the constituents of the sections of the Speaking Tests concerned with giving opinions. Although some of the relationships were high, there was in each case a proportion of students who provided adequate responses and yet had a low fluency for those responses, and some students who had high fluency but who failed to respond adequately. In the case of the 14-year-old students a majority of the students with low fluency made adequate responses, whereas for the 10-year-old students the proportion of students in this category was as low as 27 per cent for the task of making critical judgements.

One other comparison between fluency and adequacy assessments was of particular interest. Fluency when reading aloud has been compared with the total number of errors made when reading aloud as a measure of adequacy described earlier in this chapter. The relationships for both age levels are shown in Table 8.8 for the low, medium and high categories of fluency used previously, and for five categories of number of errors as shown. The results clearly indicate a high relationship between the fluency and

Table 8.8 Reading Aloud: Comparison of Errors and Fluency for 10-and 14-Year-Old Students

| Reading Aloud[a] No. of Errors (Adequacy) | Fluency | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | L% | M% | H% | L% | M% | H% |
| None | 3 | 23 | 74 | - | 21 | 79 |
| 1 - 3 | 6 | 35 | 59 | 3 | 30 | 67 |
| 4 - 7 | 12 | 47 | 42 | 10 | 35 | 55 |
| 8 - 15 | 18 | 57 | 25 | 33 | 44 | 23 |
| 16 or more | 48 | 44 | 8 | 69 | 23 | 8 |

a Missing data have been excluded.

adequacy assessments made for reading aloud. The relationship was slightly higher at the 14-year-old level than at the 10-year-old level although approximately a quarter of the students at both age levels who made between eight and fifteen reading errors were in the high reading fluency groups.

## Summary

The Speaking Tests at both age levels attempted to cover as wide a range of abilities, contexts and purposes as possible given the restricted nature of the recorded interview which comprised the tests. The main types of assessment made were those of adequacy of communication which was criterion-referenced and fluency of the responses made, a norm-referenced measure. Where agreement between different markers on an item did not reach 70 per cent of the sample of tests selected for re-scoring, that item was omitted from further consideration. Finally assessments were made of ability to provide personal details, of 19 and 24 adequacy measures for the 10-year-old and 14-year-old students respectively, and of two global fluency measures.

High proportions of students at both age levels were able to give personal details orally, with only year of birth presenting a problem for some 20 per cent of 10-year-olds. In general the results were very similar to those obtained when students had been asked to write these details in a form completion item in 1975, and this was particularly true at the 14-year-old level.

The range of tasks for which adequacy of communication was assessed, not unexpectedly produced a considerable variation in results at both age levels. At the 10-year-old level the lowest proportion of students able

to make an adequate response was 46 per cent for repeating an idea in their own words, and the highest proportion was 99 per cent for listing facts in order. For most tasks between 70 and 90 per cent of the 10-year-old students were able to respond adequately. At the 14-year-old level the lowest and highest proportions of students making an adequate response were 40 per cent (repeating an idea) and 99 per cent (listing facts) respectively, the same two tasks as for the 10-year-olds. Between 65 and 95 per cent of the 14-year-olds were able to make adequate responses to most tasks. The major factor which seemed to be important in determining the proportions of students who were able to complete a task adequately was the familiarity of the context in which the task was placed. On similar tasks in different contexts, differences were sometimes as high as 30 per cent of students at both age levels. In general, when the context was familiar to students at least 80 per cent of the students were found to be able to perform adequately the task that had been set.

The two fluency assessments reported were associated with reading aloud and with giving opinions. Although markers had been asked to award fluency scores on the basis of a normal distribution, it was found that they were able to distinguish a greater range of fluency for reading aloud than for giving opinions. However when fluency scores were related to adequacy assessments, the giving-opinion fluency scores were much more closely related to adequacy than were the reading-aloud fluency measures. This was true even when only the adequacy measures not associated with giving opinion were considered. Fluency was also more highly related to adequacy for the 10-year-old students than was the case for the 14-year-olds.

The task of reading aloud was well done by at least approximately 90 per cent of students, whether this was assessed by the number of errors made or by the literal comprehension of what was read. Fluency when reading aloud, being less related to the other speaking assessments made, would clearly depend strongly on reading ability and less on ability to perform other speaking tasks. The remainder of the Speaking Tests relied upon pictorial stimulus material and other information being read to the student in order to minimise the dependence on reading of the speaking assessments made.

CHAPTER NINE

# COMPARISON OF LISTENING AND SPEAKING PERFORMANCES

## Effects of Assessment Methods Used

The methods of assessment used in this study were limited in a number of ways. The listening tests were administered by means of an audio-cassette recorder to ensure that the presentation of the stimulus material for the test was standardized for all students, and to permit the use of a range of stimuli that otherwise would not have been possible. The difficulty associated with listening to a disembodied voice where visual cues produced by the speaker are absent, is well known and the use of video-cassette recorders to administer the listening tests would have been preferable if it were not for the very high costs of producing, duplicating, distributing and using video recordings. Although every school in the sample had access to at least one audio-cassette recorder, the same would not have been the case if video-cassette recorders had been necessary to administer the listening tests. Similar limitations applied to the speaking tests where students' responses were recorded on an audio- cassette with the attendant loss of their facial expressions and other visual responses to the test items. However apart from the expense involved, the use of video to record student responses would have been very obtrusive in the interview situation which constituted the speaking tests, whereas the presence of a cassette recorder was likely to be less threatening to the students and the teacher-interviewers.

To investigate the effects of the assessment methods used, two items were inserted in the school questionnaire (see Appendix Seven). The items concerned the nature of the relationship between the speaking test administrator and the student being tested, and the degree of use of a tape or cassette recorder normally made by the student in his language program. Other items concerning the perceived confidence with which the student approached the speaking test, and the general use of audio-recorders, radio and television by the school are also relevant here. The relationships of these items with achievement on the listening and speaking tests are considered in the remainder of this section.

## The Speaking Test Administrator

The person who administered the speaking test was asked to indicate for each student whether the test was administered to the student by:

- his or her class teacher
- another teacher at the school
- someone else known to the student
- someone not known to the student.

Concern had been expressed that, in administering the speaking test, the use of a person whom the student did not know could have had a detrimental effect upon the student's performance. Such a person was used only when a school was willing to take part in the study but the staff were unable to make arrangements to do the testing themselves. It was considered to be preferable to administer the test by arranging for a research assistant to visit the schools than to omit their students from the carefully-drawn samples. The collated results indicated that seven per cent of the 10-year-old student sample and one eighth of the 14-year-old student sample were tested by a person not previously known to them (see Table 9.1). By far the majority of students (approximately three-quarters) were tested by another teacher at their school.

The results on a representative selection of speaking tasks that were common to both age levels are shown for students tested by the four identified categories of administrator in Table 9.1. It will be noted that the performances of students who did not know the test administrator were not lower than the performances of other students. In fact there was a tendency for slightly higher proportions of these students to have given adequate responses to speaking test items. The reasonable concern that students tested by a person they did not know might perform less successfully than other students for that reason alone was not supported by the results at either age level.

## Student Use of Tape or Cassette Recorders

The teacher who taught English to each of the students in the sample was asked whether the student used a tape or cassette recorder as part of the language program at the school

- most days
- about once a week
- every now and again
- rarely or never.

Table 9.1 Relationships Between Test Administrator and Student Performance on Several Speaking Tasks

| Speaking Task[a] Adequate % | Total Sample | Test Administrator | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Own Teacher | Another Teacher | Other Known | Not Known |
| 10-Year-Old Students | | | | | |
| Give address | 96 | 93 | 97 | 93 | 98 |
| Give date of birth | 78 | 72 | 78 | 81 | 87 |
| Sequence ideas | 95 | 97 | 94 | 95 | 95 |
| Make critical judgement | 63 | 60 | 62 | 65 | 75 |
| Give message | 80 | 74 | 81 | 84 | 88 |
| Number of Students | | 163 | 936 | 51 | 87 |
| 14-Year-Old Students | | | | | |
| Give address | 96 | 94 | 96 | 100 | 95 |
| Give date of birth | 97 | 97 | 97 | 99 | 98 |
| Sequence ideas | 98 | 99 | 98 | 100 | 100 |
| Make critical judgement | 84 | 85 | 85 | 76 | 82 |
| Give message | 71 | 66 | 72 | 81 | 71 |
| Number of Students | | 87 | 934 | 76 | 158 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

It was thought that the degree of a student's familiarity with a tape or cassette recorder in English lessons might well be important for his ability to cope with the listening test and for the ease with which he accepted the presence of the cassette recorder used to record his responses for the speaking test.

The distributions of students on this item were given in Table 6.14. Although the primary school students in the sample used a recorder much more frequently than the secondary school students, at both age levels there were very few students who used a recorder more than weekly and large proportions of students who rarely or never used a recorder in their English lessons. The results for students according to their use of recorders are shown in Table 9.2 for a selection of listening and speaking tasks. Because of the small numbers, the first two categories have been collapsed. In the Table, the high frequency of use category (H) includes students who use a recorder at least once a week, the moderate category (M)

Table 9.2 Relationships Between Student Use of a Recorder in English Lessons and Performance on Some Listening and Speaking Tasks

| Task % Successful | Total Sample | | Frequency of Recorder Use | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | Age 10 | Age 14 | H | M | L | H | M | L |
| Listening | | | | | | | | |
| Literal Meaning | 27 | 43 | 28 | 29 | 25 | 47 | 42 | 43 |
| Different Situations | 47 | 80 | 56 | 44 | 46 | 79 | 80 | 81 |
| Total Test | 62 | 79 | 67 | 62 | 61 | 74 | 78 | 80 |
| Speaking[a] | | | | | | | | |
| Give address | 96 | 96 | 95 | 97 | 96 | 94 | 96 | 96 |
| Sequence ideas | 95 | 98 | 98 | 94 | 94 | 100 | 98 | 98 |
| Make critical judgement | 63 | 84 | 62 | 63 | 61 | 86 | 84 | 84 |
| Number of Students | | | 170 | 592 | 500 | 34 | 473 | 763 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

corresponds with use every now and again, and the low category (L) refers to students who used a recorder rarely or never.

In general there seemed to be little if any effect of previous use of a tape recorder on the performance of these tasks by the 14-year-old students with more students in the low usage category making adequate responses than students in the high usage category for some assessments. There was a consistent tendency however for 10-year-old students in the low usage category to have a lower performance than students in the high usage category. The effect on performance of the degree of usage by 10-year-old students of tape or cassette recorders in their English language programs is considered further in Chapter Eleven.

Perceived Student Confidence

The confidence with which a student approached the speaking test was one of the criteria used in assessing performance on the speaking test. Only one global assessment was made for each student by the person who administered the speaking test to the student. The distributions of the 10-and 14-year-old students on perceived confidence were presented in Table 8.1 and were found to be very similar. Almost half the students were considered to be generally confident, approximately a fifth were said to be hesitant at

Table 9.3 The Relationships of Perceived Student Confidence with Speaking Test Performance

| Speaking Task Adequate % | Total Sample | Student Confidence (Category)[a] 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10-Year-Old Students | | | | | |
| Give address | 96 | 98 | 96 | 96 | 90 |
| Give date of birth | 78 | 84 | 77 | 65 | 75 |
| Sequence ideas | 95 | 97 | 95 | 90 | 91 |
| Make critical judgement | 63 | 70 | 67 | 49 | 48 |
| Give message | 80 | 86 | 82 | 67 | 69 |
| Number of Students | 1258 | 628 | 244 | 188 | 161 |
| 14-Year-Old Students | | | | | |
| Give address | 96 | 97 | 96 | 94 | 94 |
| Give date of birth | 97 | 98 | 97 | 97 | 96 |
| Sequence ideas | 98 | 99 | 98 | 97 | 97 |
| Make critical judgement | 84 | 87 | 85 | 85 | 70 |
| Give message | 71 | 77 | 71 | 61 | 65 |
| Number of Students | 1282 | 587 | 289 | 192 | 179 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

first but confident later, the confidence of 15 per cent of students varied depending on the task, approximately a tenth were somewhat lacking in confidence and only two per cent were judged as being not confident at all.

For the purpose of relating perceived confidence to adequacy of response the last two categories, both indicating some degree of lack of confidence, have been collapsed because of the small student numbers in the last category. The new categories are:

1 Generally confident
2 Hesitant at first but confident later
3 Confidence variable depending on task
4 Lacking confidence.

Categories (2) and (3), both indicating a variable level of confidence, could have been collapsed also but it was considered desirable to consider the effects, if any, on the performance of category (2) students as they moved sequentially through the speaking test attempting different tasks.

This was possible as there were substantial numbers of students in both categories (2) and (3).

When the proportions of students in the four confidence categories are compared with the proportions of students in the total samples who performed adequately on the various tasks shown in Table 9.3, it is clear that students who lacked confidence were more frequently assessed as having made inadequate responses. Fewer 14-year-old students in the third category (confidence variable depending on task) performed adequately on the task of giving a message compared with students in other categories but not on other tasks. Thus the varying confidence they were judged to exhibit did appear to affect their ability to respond adequately to the different types of task. However in the case of the 10-year-old students, those in the third category had a considerably lower level of performance than other students for every task shown in Table 9.3.

Students at the 14-year-old level who were judged to be hesitant at first but confident later (category 2) did not reflect this judgement in the adequacy of the responses they made as they moved through the speaking test. There was some indication that the 10-year-olds in the same category did improve in adequacy of response as they moved through the test. On the first three items shown in Table 9.3 they had approximately the same level of performance as the total sample of students, but they had slightly higher proportions of adequate responses for the remaining two items than was the case for the total student sample.

Overall School Use of Recorders

The teacher who was co-ordinating this study within each school was asked to estimate how frequently tape or cassette recorders were used in the language program for each Year level at their school. There were four categories offered ranging from most days to rarely or never, plus an additional 'impossible to generalize' option. The different responses for the various Year levels were averaged for each school and the distributions were shown in Table 6.10. In this section the four categories have been collapsed into three - recorders are used

1 up to about once a week (H),
2 every now and again (M),
3 rarely or never (L).

This provides the same high, medium and low use categories reported earlier in this chapter for individual student use of recorders. The same listening and speaking tasks have been selected and reported in Table 9.4 so that

Table 9.4 The Relationships of Overall School Use of Recorders with Performance on Selected Listening and Speaking Tasks

| Task % Successful | Total Sample | | School Use of Recorders | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | Age 10 | Age 14 | H | M | L | H | M | L |
| Listening | | | | | | | | |
| Literal Meaning | 27 | 43 | 27 | 28 | 21 | 41 | 45 | 36 |
| Different Situations | 47 | 80 | 46 | 49 | 46 | 80 | 80 | 79 |
| Total Test | 62 | 79 | 61 | 62 | 64 | 76 | 79 | 73 |
| Speaking[a] | | | | | | | | |
| Give address | 96 | 96 | 96 | 96 | 99 | 100 | 95 | 95 |
| Sequence ideas | 95 | 98 | 95 | 95 | 94 | 98 | 98 | 99 |
| Make critical judgement | 63 | 84 | 63 | 61 | 67 | 87 | 82 | 86 |
| Number of Students | | | 484 | 576 | 139 | 202 | 672 | 205 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

these results may be compared with those in Table 9.2. With the exception of the Literal Meaning Sub-test, there was no clear relationship between the school's use of tape or cassette recorders and student success on any of the listening or speaking tasks shown in Table 9.4. These tasks were chosen as representative of the range of tasks assessed in the tests. As teachers were not asked whether they used recorders equally with able and less able students, it would not seem to be possible to pursue further any relationship between overall school use of recorders and student performance on the listening and speaking tasks tested.

## Overall School Use of Radio and Television

The co-ordinating teacher was also asked to estimate the extent of use made of radio and of television in the school's language program. The same categories already described for use of recorders were used for use of radio and use of television, and the distributions of students on these variables may be inspected in Table 6.10. The same three categories of high (H), medium (M) and low (L) usage were also developed from the four categories shown in Table 6.10 for radio and television and student performance on the selected listening and speaking tasks are shown in Table 9.5 for radio use and Table 9.6 for television use.

Table 9.5 The Relationships of Overall School Use of Radio with Performance on Selected Listening and Speaking Tasks

| Task % Successful | Total Sample | | School Use of Radio | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | Age 10 | Age 14 | H | M | L | H | M | L |
| Listening | | | | | | | | |
| Literal Meaning | 27 | 43 | 28 | 29 | 22 | 39 | 43 | 42 |
| Different Situations | 47 | 80 | 47 | 46 | 48 | 77 | 82 | 79 |
| Total Test | 62 | 79 | 61 | 64 | 61 | 74 | 78 | 79 |
| Speaking[a] | | | | | | | | |
| Give address | 96 | 96 | 97 | 97 | 95 | 99 | 97 | 96 |
| Sequence ideas | 95 | 98 | 95 | 95 | 94 | 95 | 97 | 99 |
| Make critical judgement | 63 | 84 | 61 | 65 | 61 | 86 | 83 | 84 |
| Number of Students | | | 610 | 399 | 205 | 101 | 398 | 702 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

There was no general relationship between school use of radio and student performance on the listening and speaking tasks assessed as is shown by the representative tasks for which results are presented in Table 9.5. However for the Literal Meaning Sub-test, fewer students were successful at primary schools where radio was used rarely or never. The majority of items comprising this sub-test were related to the radio current affairs program 'The World We Live In', so it would seem reasonable that 10-year-old students not accustomed to listening to radio as part of their language development program would be less likely to succeed on a sub-test requiring the literal comprehension of what they heard with such a program as the stimulus.

There was no consistent relationship between use of television in school language programs and the performance of the 14-year-old students on the listening and speaking tasks presented in Table 9.6. However there was some relationship, albeit not a consistent one, for the 10-year-old students where the low television usage group had lower proportions of students providing adequate responses for the Literal Meaning Sub-test, the total listening test and the critical judgement item of the speaking test. Although school radio usage was somewhat less frequent than school television usage, it is not clear from the data collected why there was a

Table 9.6 The Relationships of Overall School Use of Television with Performance on Selected Listening and Speaking Tasks

| Task<br>% Successful | Total Sample | | School Use of Television | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | Age 10 | Age 14 | H | M | L | H | M | L |
| Listening | | | | | | | | |
| Literal Meaning | 27 | 43 | 27 | 28 | 24 | 41 | 42 | 48 |
| Different Situations | 47 | 80 | 47 | 46 | 50 | 81 | 78 | 83 |
| Total Test | 62 | 79 | 63 | 62 | 55 | 80 | 79 | 74 |
| Speaking[a] | | | | | | | | |
| Give address | 96 | 96 | 96 | 96 | 95 | 96 | 97 | 96 |
| Sequence ideas | 95 | 98 | 95 | 95 | 93 | 98 | 98 | 98 |
| Make critical judgement | 63 | 84 | 64 | 63 | 50 | 87 | 82 | 88 |
| Number of Students | | | 827 | 273 | 109 | 340 | 707 | 181 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

more consistent relationship between television use and student performance for 10-year-old students than that between radio use and performance.

## Some Comparisons and Relationships

It will have been noted from the results presented in Chapters Seven and Eight that there were wide differences in the proportions of students who were successful on the various listening and speaking tasks assessed. In some cases the ability to accomplish one task would seem to be a prerequisite for success on another task, and the extent to which this was the case is of interest. Even some tasks which seemed to be alike in requirement, resulted in quite different levels of student performance and these tasks will be considered in this section. There were other tasks which had dissimilar requirements but which in some cases resulted in similar proportions of students being successful. These tasks will also be considered with a view to determining the proportions of students who were successful at both tasks and the proportions who were successful at one task but not at the other. The latter proportions will indicate the degree of specific difficulty experienced as opposed to more general high or low student performance.

There were also some paired listening and speaking tasks that attempted to assess the same ability, for example making critical judgements. For the listening tests the students were required to listen to what was said, to make a judgement and to indicate that judgement by selecting the correct response from four alternatives which were read out to them. For the speaking tests the students read short statements (with assistance if required), and were asked to express critical judgements orally. Thus the requirement to make critical judgements was the same but the mode of response in one case emphasised listening, and in the other case emphasised speaking. The results on these and other corresponding pairs of listening and speaking tasks are also considered in this section.

Pre-Requisite Tasks

One example from the listening tests and one from the speaking tests will be used to illustrate the relationships between tasks when one was potentially a pre-requisite of another. For listening, the ability to comprehend words and simple statements would seem to be required if a student was to be able to succeed in later sections of the test. In fact only approximately three per cent of the 10-year-old students and less than half of one per cent of the 14-year-old students failed to demonstrate that they could comprehend words and simple statements (see Table 7.2). The subsequent listening test performance of the 37 students aged 10 years who did not succeed on this sub-test was then considered. One of these students succeeded on both the literal meaning sub-test and on the total listening test, and the remainder failed on both. Thus it would seem that the ability to comprehend words and simple statements was a pre-requisite for more general listening performance. The one student who did not conform to this generalization was probably initially confused or flustered by the situation of the listening test but subsequently displayed his or her true listening ability.

In the speaking tests, it was thought that the ability to repeat an idea would be necessary if students were to be able to make critical judgements concerning the idea. However this was clearly not the case because far more of the 14-year-old students were successful at the latter task on the three occasions when these two tasks were attempted on the same topic (see Table 8.4). The picture was less clear for the 10-year-old students where higher proportions of students were able to make critical judgements on one topic whereas higher proportions were able to repeat the idea expressed on another topic. It would seem that, whereas students

Table 9.7 Comparison of Results on Two Similar Listening Tasks

| Sub-Test % Students[a] | Conversation Sub-test | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | U | S | Total | U | S | Total |
| Different Situations | | | | | | |
| Unsuccessful (U) | 21 | 32 | 53 | 4 | 16 | 20 |
| Successful (S) | 14 | 33 | 47 | 8 | 72 | 80 |
| Total | 35 | 65 | 100 | 12 | 88 | 100 |

a Missing data have been eliminated.

need to be able to understand at least the essence of the idea if they are to be able to make critical comment on it, they do not always need to be able to re-state the idea in their own words. The re-stating or summarizing of other people's ideas was normally found by many students to be more difficult than making critical comments or giving their own ideas on a topic.

Similar Tasks

Two listening tasks that required the exercise of similar abilities were represented by the Conversation and Different Situations Sub-tests. These sub-tests did not overlap but both assessments required that the student comprehend what was said where the way it was said was important for comprehension. The Conversation Sub-test consisted of a conversation between a shopkeeper and a customer for the 10-year-old students and between three members of a family for the 14-year-old students and intended meaning was conveyed by expression. The Different Situations Sub-test was the same for both age levels and consisted of ten separate statements made by one person each time where the purpose in speaking and intended audience were to be judged by what was said and the way in which it was said. The purpose in comparing performance on these two sub-tests was to assess the effect of context. There were differences in the proportions of students succeeding on these two apparently similar tasks, with the differences at the 10-year-old level being much greater than those at the 14-year-old level (see Table 9.7). The proportions of students succeeding on the Conversation Sub-test but not on the Different Situations Sub-test were very high, and were lower but still fairly high for students not succeeding on the former but succeeding on the latter Sub-test. Clearly the different contexts in which the items in these two sub-tests

Table 9.8 Comparison of Results on Two Similar Speaking Tasks

| Task % Students[a] | Supply Conversation | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | U | S | Total | U | S | Total |
| Give a message | | | | | | |
| Unsuccessful (U) | 5 | 15 | 19 | 6 | 23 | 29 |
| Successful (S) | 14 | 66 | 80 | 12 | 59 | 71 |
| Total | 19 | 81 | 100 | 18 | 82 | 100 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

were placed and the slightly different abilities required were very important for student performance, as there was no significant relationship between individual student performance on the two sub-tests at either age level ($\chi^2 < 2$, df = 1).

Two speaking tasks which were related to conversing were the request to supply conversation appropriate to a pictorial stimulus and the requirement to give a message while conversing. These tasks did have much more similar levels of performance than the listening tasks, with the 10-year-old students in particular having almost identical proportions responding adequately to the two conversing tasks (see Table 9.8). However as for the listening tasks, there was no significant relationship between individual student performance on the tasks with high proportions succeeding on one task but not on the other at both age levels ($\chi^2 < 1$, df = 1).

Dissimilar Tasks

Two non-overlapping dissimilar listening tasks of considerable interest are represented by the Literal Meaning and the Critical Judgements Sub-tests.

Table 9.9 Comparison of Results on Two Dissimilar Listening Tasks

| Sub-Test % Students[a] | Literal Meaning | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | U | S | Total | U | S | Total |
| Critical judgements | | | | | | |
| Unsuccessful (U) | 58 | 19 | 77 | 12 | 4 | 15 |
| Successful (S) | 15 | 8 | 23 | 46 | 39 | 85 |
| Total | 73 | 27 | 100 | 57 | 43 | 100 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

Table 9.10 Comparison of Results on Two Dissimilar Speaking Tasks

| Task<br>% Students[a] | Making Critical Judgements | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | U | S | Total | U | S | Total |
| Give a message | | | | | | |
| Unsuccessful (U) | 11 | 8 | 19 | 5 | 23 | 29 |
| Successful (S) | 26 | 55 | 80 | 11 | 61 | 71 |
| Total | 37 | 63 | 100 | 16 | 84 | 100 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

Both Sub-tests cut across at least two sections of the listening test but the Literal Meaning Sub-test consisted of items where only the literal comprehension of what was said was important whereas for the Critical Judgements Sub-test the way in which something was said was also important for comprehension. In the case of the 10-year-olds, similar proportions of students were successful on these two tasks yet almost twice as many 14-year-olds were successful on the Critical Judgements Sub-test compared with the Literal Meaning Sub-test. The way in which something was said seemed to be helpful for comprehension by the 14-year-old students but not by the 10-year-old students. The results of the comparisons in performance on these tasks are shown in Table 9.9. Again there were relatively high proportions of 10-year-old students who were successful on the Literal Meaning Sub-test but not on the Critical Judgements Sub-test and vice versa, even though similar proportions were successful on these two sub-tests. Although there was a very large difference in the proportions of 14-year-old students succeeding on these two sub-tests, there were still four per cent of students who were unsuccessful on the Critical Judgements Sub-test yet successful on the Literal Meaning Sub-test. The relationships for individual students on these two tasks were not significant ($\chi^2 < 2$, df = 1).

Two dissimilar speaking tasks were those involving making critical judgements and giving a message. The tasks that were identical for both age levels have been used to compare the student results on these tasks shown in Table 9.10. The levels of performance on the two tasks differed, especially at the 10-year-old level. Again it was found that there were high proportions of students who succeeded on one task but not on the other. There was no relationship between individual student performance on the two dissimilar tasks at the 14-year-old level ($\chi^2 < 1$, df = 1). There was a

Table 9.11 Comparison of Results for Conversing in the Listening and Speaking Tests

| Task/Sub-test % Students[a] | Listening: Comprehending Conversation | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | U | S | Total | U | S | Total |
| Speaking: Giving a message | | | | | | |
| Unsuccessful (U) | 8 | 12 | 20 | 4 | 25 | 29 |
| Successful (S) | 28 | 53 | 80 | 8 | 63 | 71 |
| Total | 35 | 65 | 100 | 12 | 88 | 100 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

relationship between individual student performance on the tasks when the data for the 10-year-olds presented in Table 9.10 was considered ($\chi^2 = 4.45$, df = 1). However as weighted data were used in calculating the percentages of students it is unlikely that the relationship would be significant at the 0.05 confidence level where a $\chi^2$ value of 3.84 is required for significance with one degree of freedom, under the assumption of simple random sampling.

## Listening and Speaking Comparisons

When the more important tasks were identified as described in Chapter Four, there were some listening and speaking tasks that were considered to correspond with one another. One of these pairs of listening and speaking tasks was concerned with conversing, and results for the listening sub-test Comprehending Conversation and for the speaking task of giving a message while conversing with another person are compared. Another pair of tasks were making critical judgements which were assessed at both age levels in both the listening and the speaking tests. The results for these comparisons, used to indicate some aspects of the relationship between listening and speaking tasks, are given in Table 9.11 for conversing and Table 9.12 for making critical judgements.

Inspection of Table 9.11 indicates that there was a higher proportion of 10-year-old than 14-year-old students who were successful on one conversing task but not on the other, even though the differences in overall performance of the two tasks were very similar at both age levels. However even at the 14-year-old level there were a third of the students who succeeded at one task but not at the other. The tasks were quite

Table 9.12 Comparison of Results for Making Critical Judgements in the Listening and Speaking Tests

| Task/Sub-test % Students[a] | Listening: Critical Judgements | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-Year-Olds | | | 14-Year-Olds | | |
| | U | S | Total | U | S | Total |
| Speaking: Critical Judgements | | | | | | |
| Unsuccessful (U) | 31 | 7 | 37 | 4 | 12 | 16 |
| Successful (S) | 45 | 17 | 63 | 11 | 73 | 84 |
| Total | 77 | 23 | 100 | 15 | 85 | 100 |

[a] Missing data have been eliminated.

discrete with respect to individual student performance, especially for the 10-year-old students. There was no significant relationship between individual student performance on the paired listening and speaking tasks concerned with conversing ($\chi^2$ <1, df = 1).

There was a wide difference in the proportions of successful 10-year-old students on the listening and speaking tasks where critical judgements were necessary, but not in the proportions of 14-year-old students (see Table 9.12). However in both cases again there were relatively high proportions of students who succeeded on one task but not on the other. This was particularly obvious at the 14-year-old level where, of the 27 per cent of students who did not succeed on both tasks, all but four per cent succeeded on one task but not on the other. There was no significant relationship between student performance on listening and speaking tasks requiring critical judgements at either age level ($\chi^2$ <2, df = 1).

Although conversing and making critical judgements were two tasks where comparable listening and speaking assessments were made in each case, the listening and speaking performances of individual students were not related for either task.

## Summary

It was found that the administration of the speaking test by a person who was not known to a student did not adversely affect the results obtained by the student. Thus the reasonable concern that the use of outsiders to test some students might depress their performance on the speaking test was not supported by the empirical evidence. The extent to which individual students used a tape or cassette recorder in English lessons, and the

school's general level of use of audio-recorders, radio and television was also thought likely to be related to student performance in listening and speaking. There seemed to be little or no effect of use of recorders, whether assessed for individuals or for schools, and use of radio on student performance. Interestingly there was found to be a relationship between some measures of listening and speaking and school use of television but only at the 10-year-old level. Fewer students at schools where television was used in the language program rarely or never (the low usage category) were successful on the listening test as a whole and on the speaking task of making critical judgements when compared with students at schools where television was used at least every now and again. Although almost all students would watch television at home even if not at school, it could reasonably be assumed that they are asked to do more than passively watch a program when the use of television is incorporated into lessons.

In addition to being one of the criteria which were used to assess speaking performance, student confidence as perceived by the person who administered the speaking test was found to be strongly related to performance on the various listening and speaking tasks. Fewer students who were considered to lack confidence to some degree were successful on the tasks assessed when compared with students who were generally confident. Students aged 14 years who were judged to be hesitant in the first part of the test but confident later in the test did not differ in performance in the way that might have been anticipated. However there was some progression in performance as they moved through the test by 10-year-old students whom the test administrator judged to be hesitant at first but confident later.

When the relationships between presumed pre-requisite tasks were considered, it was found that success on the listening task of comprehending words and simple statements did seem to be necessary for success on later and more complex listening tasks by 10-year-old students. There were insufficient numbers of 14-year-old students who failed to succeed on the comprehending words and simple statements sub-test for their performance on the later listening tasks to be assessed. For speaking it was found that the ability to repeat an idea was not a pre-requisite for being able to make critical judgements concerning the idea.

When student performances on apparently similar and dissimilar listening tasks and then speaking tasks were considered, it was found that there was no relationship between individual student performance on the tasks.

The same was found for apparently comparable pairings of listening and speaking tasks. These findings suggest that in some cases the different contexts in which the tasks were placed were very influential in determining student performance, and in other cases the listening and speaking abilities that students possessed were very discrete. Either situation would be likely to result in no relationship being found between tasks. Perhaps in most cases both the different contexts and the discrete nature of the abilities possessed, combined to eliminate student performance relationships between listening tasks and speaking tasks which might be anticipated. Such findings are interesting in the context of the now generally accepted concept of unity in language development (Bullock, 1975:162). Much more detailed investigation of the effects on student performance of different contexts in combination with different abilities is necessary if these relationships are to be unravelled.

CHAPTER TEN

# DETAILED ANALYSIS OF TWO SPECIFIC SPEAKING TASKS

## Introduction

In the major assessment thrust of this study the speaking test responses were scored primarily on adequacy and fluency using two different types of assessment, criterion-referenced measures of adequacy of response and normative measures of fluency of response. The adequacy of a response was assessed by taking into consideration what was said, that is what ideas were finally communicated, rather than how it was said. Adequacy was assessed against the specific requirements of each speaking task. This type of criterion-referenced assessment did not depend upon the performance of other individual students or of the group. The fluency of a response was indicated by the rate of articulation and the extent to which a continuous flow of speech was produced without excessive hesitation or slowness, that is pace, pause and rhythm of speech were assessed. Fluency was assessed by a normative measure, the markers being required to make a global assessment of each students' response in comparison with the responses of other students.

Because the scoring of the speaking tests was so time-consuming only a global normative measure of fluency of response was possible. Consequently it was thought to be of interest to look at the speaking responses in more detail by analysing the language spoken in terms of quantity of response and fluency of response. This type of analysis was not primarily concerned with the adequacy of the students' responses in terms of relevance of ideas to the question asked, rather it was concerned with an analysis of how these ideas were expressed and whether they constituted meaningful communication. Because the analysis was detailed and time-consuming only a small sample of student responses could be analysed for only two speaking tasks.

## The Tasks

The selection of tasks was limited because in order to make a comparison between the performance of the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old student samples the tasks selected had to be common to the speaking tests at both age levels. It was also considered desirable to choose tasks that could be used to compare student performance within each subgroup. The two tasks

that were finally selected from the items common to both speaking tests were chosen specifically because they encouraged the students to use two different types of language. The two tasks chosen to be analysed in detail were task no. 2.14, describing objects by referring to detail, and task no. 3.13, telling a story. These tasks were assessed by item 2(a), 2(b) and item 5(b) in the speaking tests at both age levels and the actual items may be inspected in Appendix Six.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, describing objects and telling a story were selected as two of the 22 speaking tasks chosen as possible tasks for assessment. The Advisory Committee, the research team and the teachers interviewed considered that students should be able to perform both tasks and that they were important in the development of a school's language program. Describing objects by referring to detail (task no. 2.14) was considered essential, that is a task which students must be able to perform and which is essential in a school's language development program, by 50 per cent of secondary school teachers; but fewer primary school teachers placed as much emphasis on this task.

The tasks encouraged the students to use two different types of language. In item 2 the students were asked to describe an object by referring to detail. There were two parts to this item, description of an object that was not present, a window in a room of their own house, and description of an object that was present, a pictorial representation of a box of matches. Both were familiar, commonplace objects and students were expected to give a detailed description of certain features of the objects until they had verbally built up a comprehensive picture sufficient for the listener to visualize what was being described. They were not required to be imaginative or creative in their description but to use language that was functional and concise. Skill at using purely 'transactional language' (Britton, 1973:174) is very important, not only at school where it would be essential to learning, but in employment and in social situations as well. The ability to describe something clearly without digressing unnecessarily to unrelated facts is essential to any form of communication, from giving information to general conversation.

The language required in completing this task is unimaginative in the sense that students do not have to make it up, they have only to describe in detail what is remembered or what is seen before them. It is factual and informative speech, tied down by the facts relating to the object itself, as illustrated in the following transcript of a 14-year-old student's response to item 2(a).

> It's a square window, and, it's got a, window sill a wooden window sill and, wooden frame around it, it's got, ah ordinary curtains which you pull across by yourself which have got, lilac flowers, small lilac flowers, on it, with, light-green, um leaves, it's got a white background, it has a blind, um behind the curtain and when it's hot, outside you can pull down, wooden, ah I don't know what you call them, ah, another sort of a blind and it rolls down, to stop the sun, and it's got two panes, and flyscreen on one where you pull it across.

The two parts of item 2 differed in the presentation of the stimulus material: one object had to be recalled from memory, the other was pictorially presented. Students were also expected to describe the use of the second object after they had described its physical properties, but they were only expected to describe what the window looked like. The following is a transcript of a 14-year-old student's response to item 2(b), describing a box of matches.

> Well it's a box of matches, and, um it's, pretty small, about, two inches by, no more than that, ah ha four inches by one and a half and then about, three-quarters of an inch deep, and there's a sort of a drawer inside it and you pull it out and it's got the matches in it, and you use the matches for, lighting cigarettes and, fires and stuff like that, and, the matches are just wooden with chemical stuff on the top which is red usually, and there's about fifty in the box, and you light it by striking against the side of the box.

It was expected that item 5(b) would elicit a different use of language than item 2. Students were asked to tell a story in their own words after having read aloud a section from the story book A Fly Went By (McClintock, 1958:3-19). This allowed the student scope to speak imaginatively and creatively, while basing his story on a broad outline of facts. Thus he could use 'expressive language' (Britton, 1973:174), in the sense that he could recreate a story by the use of his imagination and his own perceptions in order to interest the listener. The expectation was that the student would create, in his own words, a story with as much character as the original book. However, the wording of the question:
'Would you explain what the story is about, up to there,' lent itself to a number of interpretations, from a lengthy and wordy point by point description of the main events in the story, complete with direct speech, as illustrated by this transcript of a 14-year-old student's response:

> Um, it's about a boy who was just sitting in a boat, and um he saw a fly go past and he was shaking with fear so he asked him why he was shaking with fear and he said because, um, a frog was frog was after him, so he told the frog to stop, and um he asked him why he wanted the fly because the fly wasn't hurting him and

> he said he he didn't want the fly but he had to hop because he had to get away from a cat that was chasing him, and so the cat came afterwards and he asked it he asked the cat to stop, and he asked the cat why he was chasing the frog, and the cat said he wasn't chasing the frog, he was, he was running away from a dog. Yeah, so then they all went past each other and then the guy asked himself what could he do because they were all going so quickly and he couldn't stop them.

to more succinct descriptions of events by a 10-year-old student;

> So um fly, he's getting chased by a, by a frog and the frog's getting chased by a cat and the cat's getting chased by a dog.

and by a 14-year-old student:

> The fly thought that, the frog the cat and the dog, wanted to catch him.

One 14-year-old student saw no need to even mention the participants in the story, preferring to summarize the action as briefly as possible:

> The story is about a boy who's, seeing some, action of an, different animals chasing each other in sequence a series.

Although the story was written for young children and was quite simple to understand, when the students came to give a description of the plot many became involved in language mazes and false starts and found the repetition of the events more difficult than expected, as illustrated by this response by a 10-year-old student:

> It's telling, the the cat, er want to be, jump, like the, the, the fly was jumping, and the boy asked him why, because the the the the frog was want to to go to go and eat the, just to, jump like the frog, and the cat wanted, to to jump like the fl. to fly, the frog wanted to fly like the fly and the cat wanted to jump like the, er frog and the dog wanted to run like the cat.

## Selection of the Sample

A measure of verbal ability of students was provided by the scores obtained from a short word knowledge test developed by R.L. Thorndike (1973). It was decided to examine the speech of students at the extremes of the word knowledge scores, after they were corrected for guessing, which were used as the basis of selection of the student sample. It was hypothesized that the ability to describe objects orally and to tell a story orally may be dependent to some extent on the student's command of vocabulary. Those students at both age levels who displayed the widest range of vocabulary formed a group which will be referred to as the 'high' group, while those students with the smallest vocabulary range will be referred to as the 'low' group.

Table 10.1 State Distribution of Sample

| Number of Students | ACT | NSW | VIC | QLD | SA | WA | TAS | NT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10-Year-Old | | | | | | | | |
| Low Group | 2 | 2 | 3 | - | 1 | 2 | - | 2 |
| High Group | 1 | 2 | - | 2 | 4 | - | 1 | 2 |
| 14-Year-Old | | | | | | | | |
| Low Group | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | - | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| High Group | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - |

One standard deviation above and below the mean for the whole sample on corrected word knowledge scores was calculated for each age group and six male and six female students were selected at random from each of these extremes. This produced a 14-year-old sub-sample of twelve students in the high group with a range of scores between 24 and 40, the highest possible score, and twelve students in the low group with a range of scores from zero to eight. (Although six was the cut-off point for this group two students had to be chosen with scores of eight because there were insufficient students of both sexes within the range from zero to six.) The 10-year-old sub-sample consisted of twelve students in the high group with scores greater than 28, and twelve students in the low group with a range of scores up to seven. Each of the students chosen, in the 10-year-old and 14-year-old age groups, completed all sections of the testing program.

No attempt was made to distribute the sample evenly across all Australian States on the assumption that probably no definite State differences would exist, but a fairly even distribution did result, except for the one or two omissions indicated in Table 10.1.

## Description of Analyses

A number of measures were chosen in order to analyse each individual spoken response to items 2(a), 2(b), and item 5(b) in terms of quantity of response and fluency of response for the 48 students chosen. There were three important elements to be taken into consideration - the words the student spoke, the time the student took delivering his response, and whether the student was communicating meaningfully. A number of measures were chosen in order to analyse the responses in each of these areas. The words the students spoke were assessed in terms of a word-count of complete

words, incomplete words, non-words, and contractions. The length of the responses, initial pauses, and all pauses lasting for more than one second during the responses were timed in order to determine how long the student spent in actually producing spoken language. The proportion of the words spoken that constituted meaningful communication was determined by analysing the responses in terms of communication units and mazes which were measures developed by Walter D. Loban (Loban, 1963). The measures used are now described in some detail.

Number of complete words. This was a count of whole words only.

Number of non-words. Included in this group was any expression which was not a word, for example 'um' and 'ah'.

Number of incomplete words. This was a count of any word that the student began but the pronunciation of which was not completed. Loban (1963:8) referred to these as 'initial parts of words'.

Number of contractions. A contraction was formed when the student joined two words by pronouncing them as one word, while retaining the original meaning. This was shown on the transcripts by omitting a letter or letters and indicating the omission by an apostrophe, for example 'doesn't' for 'does not' and 'let's' for 'let us'.

Total number of words. Included in this count were complete words and incomplete words.

Length of initial pause. The initial pause was defined as the time taken between the end of the question asked by the interviewer and the beginning of the student's answer. It was an indication of how long it took a student to formulate an answer and begin to put it into words.

Length of pauses. A pause was defined as any break that lasted for more than one second during the spoken response in which no words or sounds were produced by the student. Any pause lasting for one second or less was considered to be only a stop for breath and is indicated by a comma in the transcripts. Each pause was timed by stop-watch and recorded.

Total pause time. The lengths of all pauses were added together in order to determine the total length of time the students spent pausing and saying nothing at all.

Number of pauses. The number of pauses over one second in length was totalled.

Total length of spoken response. The length of the responses was timed from the moment the student started speaking to the end of his last word, regardless of the pauses in between. The time was recorded in seconds.

Actual length of spoken response. The total pause time for each response was subtracted from the total time taken to produce the response thus giving an indication of how long the student spent in actually producing spoken language.

Number of communication units. A communication unit is the smallest group of words containing meaning which cannot be divided further without loss of that meaning. According to Loban (1963:5) the communication unit 'can be identified by the semantic meaning which is being communicated'. Generally it contains the grammatical independent clause with any of its modifiers; but in some cases it may be only one or a few words given in answer to a question, or it may be one or a few words preceded and followed by silence and not semantically attached to any other group of words.

Number of words in communication units. This was a count of all words in each communication unit.

Number of mazes. According to Loban (1963:8) a maze is a language tangle which includes hesitations, false starts, incomplete words and meaningless repetitions. It is a word or a series of words which do not add up to meaningful communication and is not semantically necessary to the communication unit.

Number of words in mazes. This was a count of all words in each maze, including all incomplete words.

## Results of Analyses

### Word Count

Table 10.2 indicates that for sheer volume of words the high group students produced more spoken language than did the low group students. At both 10-year-old and 14-year-old age levels the high group students produced nearly twice as many words as the low group students, and for item 2(a) they produced more than twice as many words.

The two age levels showed a parallel development from item to item, and increased the number of words in much the same proportions except for item 5(b) where the 14-year-old high group produced 516 more words than the low group and the 10-year-old high group produced only 183 more words.

Table 10.2 Total Number of Words for High and Low Groups and Mean Number of Words per Student for Each Item

| Item | 10-Year-Old Students | | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Word Count | | Mean | | Word Count | | Mean | |
| | L[a] | H[b] | L | H | L | H | L | H |
| 2(a) | 309 | 675 | 25.8 | 56.3 | 238 | 651 | 19.8 | 54.3 |
| 2(b) | 441 | 789 | 36.8 | 65.8 | 460 | 738 | 38.3 | 61.5 |
| 5(b) | 689 | 872 | 57.4 | 72.7 | 792 | 1308 | 66.0 | 109.0 |

[a] In all tables the low group is referred to as L.

[b] In all tables the high group is referred to as H.

Counting the number of words did not, of course, take into account the quality and relevance of the ideas that were expressed, but it did indicate that those students with a greater command of vocabulary (as indicated by the word knowledge scores for each group) could produce a far greater volume of words than those with little command of vocabulary. Regardless of what they said, the high group were obviously willing to use language more freely than the low group students.

The ability to double and even treble the number of words spoken in response to item 2(a) by three out of the four groups in response to item 5(b) could indicate a number of possibilities. The stimulus material may have been more successful in eliciting a response, the type of task may have been more familiar to the students, or they may have become more familiar with the test as it proceeded. However, regardless of these aspects, it does indicate that the ability to use language for this type of imaginative, creative story-telling required in item 5(b) was found to be much easier than the factual, transactional language required in item 2 for which some students in the low groups produced only five or six words in response and two students produced no words whatsoever.

Non-words and Contractions

One reason why the high group students could produce more words at both age levels was that they did not use unnecessary non-words and they contracted many words such as 'I'm' for 'I am', and 'they're' for 'they are'. This served a double purpose in that more words could be produced in a certain time and fluency, in the sense of flow of words, was improved. Although there was no time limit set for student responses,

Table 10.3 Percentage of Non-words and Percentage of Contractions in Relation to Total Number of Words

| Item | 10-Year-Old Students | | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Non-Words | | Contractions | | Non-Words | | Contractions | |
| | L % | H % | L % | H % | L % | H % | L % | H % |
| 2(a) | 6.5 | 4.2 | 8.1 | 8.7 | 10.1 | 5.5 | 10.1 | 8.5 |
| 2(b) | 3.4 | 3.9 | 4.3 | 6.9 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 6.3 | 4.7 |
| 5(b) | 2.9 | 1.6 | 2.3 | 5.0 | 2.2 | 1.5 | 5.7 | 4.0 |

students themselves clearly set limits to what they considered to be a reasonable time in responding.

Less frequent use of non-words led to a response that was easier to listen to, and the student sounded more relaxed, natural and confident. At the 14-year-old age level for item 2(a) one non-word was spoken for every 18 words by the high group, and one non-word was spoken for every 10 words by the low group. When it was taken into consideration that a non-word was usually preceded or followed by a pause, then the rate of language flow in the low group was considerably hampered by their more frequent use of non-words.

Whether it was connected to a pause or not, the use of a non-word was generally a technique for gaining a little time for thought. Table 10.3 indicates that the language flow for each group improved considerably from item 2 to item 5(b), but it also indicates that the high groups at both age levels were producing and controlling a more relaxed language flow than the low group students. In the high 14-year-old and 10-year-old groups for item 5(b) the students were speaking at a rate of one non-word for every 69 and 62 words respectively; and in the low 14-year-old and 10-year-old groups they were speaking at a rate of one non-word for every 47 and 34 words respectively.

By indicating that the high groups at both age levels had much the same control over their use of non-words, these figures suggest that the ability to control non-words was not a skill that 14-year-old students were more successful at than 10-year-old students, but was directly related to the students' range of vocabulary.

There was a more unusual pattern to the use of contractions. The high 10-year-old group and the low 14-year-old group contracted words to much the same degree, but the low 10-year-old group and the high 14-year-old group used contracted words less frequently. This would seem to indicate that the use of contractions may vary with age and language experience. A possible explanation for the low 10-year-old group not using contractions more frequently could be that they had less need to contract words because their rate of delivery was much slower and they found it difficult to express themselves because of a more limited vocabulary range. The high 10-year-old group had more control of language and contracted words more efficiently which helped them produce a greater quantity of words in the time they spent speaking. On the other hand the 14-year-old high group had an even greater control of language because of experience, increased vocabulary range and confidence, and once again decreased the use of contractions which subsequently improved the clarity of the spoken utterance because pronunciation of words became more distinct.

Pauses

The major obstacle to a smooth rate of flow of words was unnecessary pausing. Pauses were of two kinds, productive and unproductive. Pauses were productive if they were followed by relevant spoken utterances, that is, if they were used by the student to think out what was to be said next, and if what they did say was relevant to what they had said before the pause. Two types of pauses were timed in this study, the initial pause as the student pondered how to begin an answer, and the pauses that were scattered throughout each response.

Table 10.4 indicates that students in both high and low groups at both age levels spent less time formulating their answers in relation to the total length of their response from item 2 to item 5(b), thus indicating that they found the more creative expression of item 5(b) easier to produce than the factual description of item 2. To some extent there may have been an age factor involved here as the 14-year-old students in both high and low groups generally took less time to begin their answers in relation to the total length of their response, especially for item 2(a). Using functional, transactional language may be more difficult for a 10-year-old student than for a 14-year-old student.

When the quantity of language, that is the total number of words produced for each item (see Table 10.2) was taken into account, it was

Table 10.4 Percentage of Initial Pause and Percentage of Total Pause Time During Responses in Relation to the Total Length of the Responses

| Item | 10-Year-Old Students | | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Initial Pause | | Total Pause Time | | Initial Pause | | Total Pause Time | |
| | L % | H % | L % | H % | L % | H % | L % | H % |
| 2(a) | 35.8 | 16.9 | 53.1 | 31.9 | 18.6 | 9.1 | 58.0 | 34.9 |
| 2(b) | 12.9 | 5.6 | 37.0 | 29.7 | 9.8 | 5.8 | 44.0 | 24.8 |
| 5(b) | 6.9 | 5.8 | 26.4 | 11.9 | 7.6 | 5.2 | 24.5 | 13.1 |

obvious that the high group students were decreasing the amount of time spent in formulating their responses as the length of the responses in seconds and the total number of words increased. The low group students spent more time thinking about how to begin a response and then said much less than the high group students.

The pattern of pausing, or hesitating for longer than one second, that emerged between high and low groups was very similar for the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old age levels, indicating that control of pausing was a skill that was used more efficiently by students who had a greater vocabulary range. For item 2(a), students in both low groups spent more time saying nothing than they did saying something, which produced a very laboured and disjointed response. The low incidence of pausing by the high group students indicated that the pauses were used more productively. Students in the low groups paused quite often, sometimes for long periods of time, but still could not produce another communication unit or complete the one they had begun; whereas in the high groups, taking into account the much greater quantity of words they produced (see Table 10.2), students used the pauses in order to plan and form the next idea they would utter. The students in the high groups said much more, paused only infrequently, used these pauses more efficiently in order to produce another idea or elaborate on what they had just said, and therefore increased the fluency of their responses.

The following two transcripts illustrate the more productive pausing technique used by a high group student compared to the less productive pausing of a low group student.

It ar [pause 1.2 sec] is consisted of four panes, two of which are very large and two are small, the two small panes are each below the large panes, and it's divided, and it's made out of bl. blackwood, the edging [pause 1.9 sec] um the two small windows [pause 2.2 sec] one is opening, and has a, screen on it, to keep flies out, and at the top, it has a [pause 1.9 sec] surrounding for curtain hangings.

(14-year-old student, high group, item 2(a))

Well [pause 2.2 sec] it's a box of matches [pause 7.1 sec] which has matches in it and [pause 4.4 sec] and it also lights, fire [pause 2.9 sec] fire and [pause 6.8 sec] that's all.

(14-year-old student, low group, item 2(b))

There were different reasons for pausing. Pauses were used for effect to highlight what had been said, or used as time to gather thoughts together to think of what to say next or to search for the appropriate word to use; or they were not used effectively at all which indicated that the student was having great difficulty with the task he had to perform. The latter type of pausing was used more frequently by the low group students than by the high group students at both age levels. This unnecessary pausing hampered their flow of words and disrupted the meaning of what they were saying because the pauses often came in midthought rather than at the end of an idea. The following two transcripts illustrate how disjointed a response became when the pausing broke into the idea the student was trying to express indicating the confusion in his thinking processes and the difficulty he had expressing himself orally.

It's about [pause 1.2 sec] um [pause 2.1 sec] it's about [pause 1.1 sec] the fly want, wanted to go [pause 1.4 sec] home, then the and the frog was behind the [pause 2.0 sec] fly and, the fly thought that the frog, would eat him [pause 1.8 sec] then the frog was running away 'cause the cat was chasing the frog, the frog thought that the cat would eat him [pause 1.4 sec] and the cat was running away because he thought that the dog would eat him.

(10-year-old student, low group, item 5(b))

Well ah [pause 6.7 sec] well, we've got one in the loungeroom [pause 1.4 sec] ah [pause 1.3 sec] you can see, all the fields, and the valleys, and all the Dean's Marsh, and ah [pause 1.1 sec] it's a square window [pause 2.3 sec] and ah, it's [pause 1.7 sec] there's four windows [pause 2.1 sec] on the [pause 1.2 sec] same [pause 1.4 sec] one [pause 2.6 sec] and [pause 2.8 sec] its colour's white [pause 3.1 sec] and ah [pause 2.2 sec] that's about it.

(14-year-old student, low group, item 2(a))

When the pausing did occur at the end of each idea, and was held for too long, it made the spoken utterance sound as if it had no cohesion. The responses of these two low-group students indicate the confusing

Table 10.5 Percentage of Number of Pauses in Relation to Total Number of Words

| Item | 10-Year-Old Students Number of Pauses | | 14-Year-Old Students Number of Pauses | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | L % | H % | L % | H % |
| 2(a) | 13.3 | 7.0 | 14.1 | 8.8 |
| 2(b) | 8.4 | 6.1 | 12.2 | 5.4 |
| 5(b) | 6.7 | 2.3 | 5.8 | 2.8 |

effects of unproductive midthought pausing and pauses held for too long between communication units.

> The window um [pause 3.4 sec] it's glass [pause 1.1 sec] um has patterns on it [pause 1.7 sec] um [pause 3.2 sec] it um opens [pause 3.1 sec] um [pause 12.0 sec]. That's all.
> (10-year-old student, low group, item 2(a))

> Ah [pause 1.3 sec] it's [pause 1.9 sec] a rectangle shape [pause 1.6 sec] and there's ah another rectangle inside it [pause 1.3 sec] piece [pause 2.8 sec] some pieces [pause 1.2 sec] of thin wood, inside the box [pause 1.1 sec] with [pause 1.1 sec] red [pause 1.3 sec] tips, on one end [pause 1.2 sec] and it [pause 1.4 sec] you use it for [pause 2.7 sec] lighting fires or [pause 2.2 sec] things like that.
> (14-year-old student, low group, item 2(b))

Single pauses ranged from 1.1 seconds to more than 20.0 seconds in some cases, and the longer the pauses became the less productively they were used. In general, the length of pauses became longer towards the end of the responses indicating that the students were running out of ideas, as illustrated in the following response.

> Well it's to light fires [pause 1.9 sec] in the, in the, in the, loungeroom [pause 1.9 sec] fireplace, and [pause 2.6 sec] for people who smoke, and [pause 5.6 sec] I don't know any other things.
> (10-year-old student, low group, item 2(b))

In relation to the total number of words produced students in the low groups paused much more frequently (see Table 10.5) and for longer periods of time (see Table 10.4) than the students in the high groups. When the students' range of vocabulary was very limited they had to pause more often to find a way to express their thoughts and this in turn further confused their whole response. All groups controlled frequency of pausing more effectively in item 5(b) than in Item 2 which gave some indication of the difficulty the latter task presented to them.

Table 10.6 Total Pause Time, Total Length and Actual Length of Spoken Responses, and Means (in seconds)

| Item | Length of Responses and Pause Time | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total Length | | Mean | | Total Pause Time | | Actual Length | | Mean | |
| | L | H | L | H | L | H | L | H | L | H |
| 10-Year-Olds | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2(a) | 219.5 | 331.8 | 18.3 | 27.7 | 116.6 | 105.8 | 102.9 | 226.0 | 8.6 | 18.8 |
| 2(b) | 239.9 | 349.4 | 20.0 | 29.1 | 88.7 | 103.9 | 151.2 | 245.5 | 12.6 | 20.5 |
| 5(b) | 317.4 | 304.5 | 26.5 | 25.4 | 83.9 | 36.1 | 233.5 | 268.4 | 19.5 | 22.4 |
| 14-Year-Olds | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2(a) | 188.1 | 350.2 | 15.7 | 29.9 | 109.1 | 122.2 | 77.0 | 228.0 | 6.4 | 19.0 |
| 2(b) | 248.5 | 347.0 | 20.7 | 28.9 | 109.4 | 86.2 | 139.1 | 260.8 | 11.6 | 21.7 |
| 5(b) | 324.4 | 392.1 | 27.0 | 32.7 | 79.4 | 51.2 | 245.0 | 340.9 | 20.4 | 28.4 |

Length of Spoken Responses in Seconds

Students spoke for a much longer period of time in response to item 5(b) than item 2 in all groups and paused less (see Table 10.6). There could be a number of explanations for this, but it does indicate the students' greater ease with item 5(b), and suggests that most students perceived it as a task in which they said as much as they could rather than as little as they could. There was no time limit set on the students' responses so they spoke for as long a period of time as they felt it was necessary to answer the question.

Students in the high groups at both age levels spent more time responding to the items and produced a greater quantity of words than the students in the low groups, which suggested that not only did the latter group say less they also had more difficulty saying less. Loban (1963:35) observed that 'in respect to vocabulary, it seems logical that children with large and readily accessible vocabularies would find expression easier than those with limited vocabularies'.

It was also noted that the 14-year-old high group students controlled their expression more efficiently than the 10-year-old high group students, which suggests that proficiency in oral language is a skill that students with a wide vocabulary range continually develop from year to year as they mature.

Communication Units and Mazes

All the measures so far discussed - word count, non-words, contractions, pausing and length of responses, do not, however, take into account whether

Table 10.7 Percentage of Words in Mazes in Relation to Total Number of Words and Percentage of Mazes Occurring in Relation to Number of Communication Units

| Item | 10-Year-Old Students | | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Words in Mazes | | Mazes | | Words in Mazes | | Mazes | |
| | L % | H % | L % | H % | L % | H % | L % | H % |
| 2(a) | 4.2 | 5.3 | 17.8 | 26.1 | 8.4 | 7.8 | 29.4 | 23.3 |
| 2(b) | 7.7 | 8.5 | 36.0 | 35.5 | 11.7 | 6.8 | 29.8 | 27.5 |
| 5(b) | 10.0 | 7.2 | 44.6 | 34.6 | 8.1 | 3.8 | 36.1 | 24.1 |

the student was saying anything that could make sense to the listener. Division of the responses into communication units and mazes does indicate what proportion of the words were used in meaningful communication and what proportion made no sense at all.

For all groups Table 10.7 indicates that a greater proportion of the words spoken was used for meaningful communication, rather than meaningless mazes. However for the low 10-year-old group, as the number of words for each item increased the number of words in the mazes also increased, which indicated that as the students in this group attempted to say more their confusion in trying to find a way to express themselves became greater. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, A Fly Went By may have been simple to understand, but the repetition of the story presented some difficulty for the 10-year-old low group students and, even though they generally succeeded in an adequate plot outline eventually, the increased number of language mazes and the increased number of words in each maze, indicated the difficulty they had with their oral language expression.

On the other hand the high group students were able to reduce the number of mazes as they increased their total output of words, which indicated that they were controlling their word mazes more efficiently while using the expressive language required by item 5(b).

Table 10.8 indicates that in relation to the total number of words used the high group students at both age levels were reducing the number of communication units from item 2 to item 5(b), but Table 10.9 indicates that at the same time they were increasing the number of words in each communication unit thereby producing an utterance with a much more complex grammatical structure.

Table 10.8 Percentages of Number of Communication Units and Number of Mazes in Relation to Total Number of Words

| Item | 10-Year-Old Students | | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Communication Units | | Mazes | | Communication Units | | Mazes | |
| | L % | H % | L % | H % | L % | H % | L % | H % |
| 2(a) | 14.6 | 10.2 | 2.6 | 2.7 | 12.0 | 11.2 | 3.5 | 2.6 |
| 2(b) | 11.3 | 9.6 | 4.1 | 3.4 | 10.2 | 9.4 | 3.0 | 2.6 |
| 5(b) | 9.4 | 8.9 | 4.2 | 3.1 | 7.7 | 8.6 | 2.8 | 2.1 |

Consider the greater sophistication of the opening communication units of these two 14-year-old high group students for item 5(b) to those of the two 14-year-old low group students which follow.

> A little boy sitting by the lake, when the fly comes past, is wondering why the fly was going so fast .....
> (14-year-old student, high group, item 5(b))

> The story is about a boy who is sitting by a lake .....
> (14-year-old student, high group, item 5(b))

> There's a little boy sitting down .....
> (14-year-old student, low group, item 5(b))

> It was about, oh the boy .....
> (14-year-old student, low group, item 5(b))

On the other hand, the number of mazes and the average number of words per maze remained fairly constant for the high 10-year-old and the low 14-year-old groups for each item. The 14-year-old high group students reduced these when telling the story in item 5(b), but the 10-year-old low group students increased the number of mazes and the number of words in each maze when responding to this item.

Long complicated mazes [which are enclosed in parentheses in the transcripts] such as the following:

> ..... [um it's a wood, it's wood, I mean] it's cardboard .....
> (14-year-old student, low group, item 2(b))

or short frequent mazes:

> It's about, [um, it's about], the fly [want] wanted to go home .....
> (10-year-old student, low group, item 5(b))

upset not only the fluency of the oral language but also disrupted the semantics of what the students were saying.

Table 10.9 Mean Number of Words per Communication Unit and Mean Number of Words per Maze

| Item | 10-Year-Old Students | | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Words/C.U. | | Words/Maze | | Words/C.U. | | Words/Maze | |
| | L | H | L | H | L | H | L | H |
| 2(a) | 6.6 | 9.3 | 1.6 | 2.0 | 6.4 | 8.2 | 2.0 | 3.0 |
| 2(b) | 8.1 | 9.5 | 1.9 | 2.5 | 8.6 | 10.0 | 3.9 | 2.6 |
| 5(b) | 9.5 | 10.4 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 11.9 | 11.2 | 2.9 | 1.8 |

The low group students became entangled in the words they were using because they were not really clear about what they were trying to express. The high group students often followed a maze by finishing the original thought or by repeating the idea again more clearly, thus using their experiment with words to find a way out. However the low group students often abandoned the attempt and thereby gained nothing from the maze except to add to the confusion of their oral expression. In the following responses the high group student continued the original idea whereas the two low group students abandoned the attempt and started again.

> ..... and um the boy's [pretty um ar sort of ar] thinking it's strange.
> (10-year-old student, high group, item 5(b))

> Well, [the box ah, the stick with the, red thing on the end, strikes the, you get a] you get the stick .....
> (14-year-old student, low group, item 2(b))

> ..... [um you cou., oh] it's fairly long .....
> (14-year-old student, low group, item 2(b))

Age Comparisons

An interesting comparison could be made between the high 10-year-old group and the low 14-year-old group which might suggest that if a student's verbal ability affected the rate of progress of his oral language ability, then the low group students would not only improve at a much slower rate than the high group students but would show less ability on nearly all measures. This hypothesis was supported by the fact that the 10-year-old high group students generally produced language more fluently and in greater quantity than the 14-year-old low group students. The latter group produced less words in their spoken responses than the 10-year-old students but more non-words, took longer to begin an answer, paused nearly twice as many times in relation to the number of words produced, and the mean length of pause was

longer. In fact the 14-year-old low group showed even less control over pausing than the 10-year-old low group. In only one area did the 10-year-old high group and the 14-year-old low group indicate a similar ability. They showed much the same control over the use of contractions in relation to the total number of words they produced. In general the 14-year-old low group spoke for a shorter period of time, produced fewer words, and paused more often for longer periods of time than the high 10-year-old students.

The 14-year-old low group students also experienced more difficulty communicating their ideas than the 10-year-old high group. Although these two groups produced approximately the same number of mazes in relation to the total number of words produced, the 14-year-old low group students produced more words per maze. For some items the latter students produced more words per maze than the 10-year-old low group. It might be hypothesized that as the low group students became older their control of word mazes declined whereas the 14-year-old high group students reduced the number of mazes. Students who have difficulty expressing themselves orally may find it becomes even more difficult as they mature in age. This decline in ability can also be seen in the use of communication units. The 10-year-old high group students used fewer communication units than the 14-year-old low group students but the mean number of words in each unit was higher. This indicated that the younger students with a greater range of vocabulary were using more complex sentence structures to express their ideas. In general the high 10-year-old group students showed superior ability in producing quantity and fluency of language and expressed themselves with less difficulty than the low 14-year-old group.

## Comparison With Other Variables

### Country of Birth and Years in Australia

The sample consisted of a fairly homogeneous group with respect to ethnic background. A summary of the distributions for both age groups is given in Table 10.10. At least ten of the students in the high and low groups at each age level had been born in Australia, and the majority of their parents were born in either Australia or an English-speaking country. Of those students who were not born in Australia, two of the 10-year-old low group students had been in the country less than five years and the other four students had been in Australia seven or more years.

Table 10.10 Country of Birth for Students and Their Parents

| Country of Birth | 10-Year-Old Students | | | | | | 14-Year-Old Students | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Student | | Father | | Mother | | Student | | Father | | Mother | |
| | L | H | L | H | L | H | L | H | L | H | L | H |
| Australia | 10 | 11 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 11 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| UK, Eire & NZ | | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 3 | | 3 |
| Greece | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Italy | | | | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | |
| Other Europe | | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 2 | | 2 | | 3 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | |
| Missing Data | | | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | | | 1 | | 1 | |
| Totals | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |

Languages Spoken in the Home

Two-thirds or more of the students in each group spoke English as the only language in the home. Two students from the 10-year-old high group and three students from the 14-year-old low group spoke English and a European language. No English at all was spoken in the homes of two 10-year-old low group students. A distribution of language usage in the home is given in Table 10.11 and is similar to Table 6.18 setting out the whole sample distribution in Chapter Six.

Table 10.11 Languages Spoken in the Homes of Students

| Language Combination | Numbers of 10-Year-Old Students | | Numbers of 14-Year-Old Students | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | L | H | L | H |
| English Only | 8 | 8 | 9 | 12 |
| English + North European Language | | 1 | 1 | |
| English + South European Language | | 1 | 2 | |
| English + Other Language | | | | |
| No English Spoken | 2 | | | |
| Missing Data | 2 | 2 | | |
| Totals | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |

Table 10.12 Place by Size of Family

| Category | Number of 10-Year-Old Students | | Number of 14-Year-Old Students | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | L | H | L | H |
| 1st out of 1, 2, 3 | 1 | 4 | | 2 |
| 2nd out of 2, 3 | 2 | 2 | | 1 |
| 3rd out of 3 | 1 | | 1 | |
| 1st out of 4 or 5 | 1 | | | 1 |
| 2nd or 3rd out of 4 or 5 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 4th or 5th out of 4 or 5 | 1 | | 2 | 3 |
| 1st or 3rd out of 6 or more | | | | |
| 4th or 5th out of 6 or more | | | 3 | 1 |
| 6th or more out of 6 or more | 1 | | 2 | |
| Missing Data | 3 | 4 | 1 | 3 |

Place by Size of Family

Students in the low groups at both age levels came from much larger families than students in the high groups who were more often the first or second born of smaller family groups. Each of the students in the 10-year-old high group who failed to indicate their place in the family came from families of two or three children so their place must have been that of first, second, or third. Of the three missing data cases in the low group two families consisted of four children and one of six children. Similarly with the missing data cases of the 14-year-old students, two of the high group students came from families consisting of three children and one student came from a family of four, whereas the student in the low group who did not indicate her place came from a family of twelve. The distributions of family size and place are shown in Table 10.12.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Six, family size, where there were more than three children, was shown to be important for reading and numeration by Bourke and Keeves (1977:89 and 102), and the results of the work described in this chapter do indicate that family size and position in family did seem to bear significantly on the development of oral language, particularly at the 10-year-old level.

As much oral language development takes place in the home before the student reaches school age, it is to be expected that family size, and

perhaps more significantly, place in family, would be most important for speaking and, possibly, for listening also.

The average number of children in the families of the 10-year-old low and high groups was 4.2 and 2.5 respectively, and for the 14-year-old low and high groups was 6.1 and 4.1 respectively. Although the 14-year-old high group students came from larger families than the 10-year-old high group students, the increasing size of their families as they became older possibly had less effect on their language development than their place in the family.

Listening Results

There was a significant difference in the performance on the listening test between the high and low groups at both age levels. Cutting scores were calculated for the listening tests on the basis that students reaching the criterion level should have had a true score of 80 per cent of items correct. If the total test result were taken as a summary of student performance on the listening test, only six of the 10-year-old low group students and two of the 14-year-old low group students reached the cutting scores of 38 and 39 respectively (see Table 7.2). Those students with a wide vocabulary range did perform more successfully. Only two students in the 10-year-old high group failed to reach the cutting score of 38 and all students in the 14-year-old high group reached the criterion of an 80 per cent performance level.

Summary

A distinctly different pattern of oral language emerged between the students in the high and low groups at both age levels, and the oral language development at the 10-year-old level was similar in many respects to the development at the 14-year-old level.

Both the 10-year-old and 14-year-old students with a wide range of vocabulary and higher verbal ability produced a greater quantity of words and spoke more fluently because they contracted words when necessary and used fewer non-words and pauses. Pauses were not only used less frequently, but were held for shorter periods of time, and when they were used the students usually followed the pause by elaborating on what they had just said or producing another idea thereby indicating that the pause had been used productively. The longer, more frequent pauses of the low group students confused their responses by interrupting the meaning of what they

were saying. The pauses often occurred in the middle of the expression of an idea, and were used less productively by the student. The increasing use of longer and longer pauses in a passage usually indicated that the student was running out of ideas.

As the high group students increased their total output of words they reduced the number of mazes used and the number of words in each maze. At the same time they decreased the number of communication units used but increased the number of words in each unit thereby grammatically structuring their responses in a more complex way and improving their oral language expression both semantically and fluently. For the low group, as the number of words in the communication units increased, so did the number of words in the mazes, indicating that, as they tried to make their utterances more complex, they got into even greater difficulty expressing themselves. The mean number of words in each communication unit was considerably lower for the low group than the high group yet the incidence of mazes was much higher. In general, high group students said much more and expressed themselves more efficiently, whereas the low group students said less and had more difficulty saying it.

When comparisons across age levels were made, the 10 and the 14-year-old high group students showed much the same control over language although in some respects the 14-year-old group controlled their oral language expression more efficiently. It was also found that the 10-year-old high group students performed better than the 14-year-old low group students on all measures except the use of contractions where a similar level of performance was observed.

Both high and low group students at both age levels found it more difficult to produce functional, transactional language than creative, expressive language; the 10-year-old low group having the most difficulty of all. There may have been an age factor at work here in that 10-year-old students may have been less familiar with factual language description and more familiar with producing more imaginative responses. The primary teachers who were asked to rate the importance of the speaking tasks (as described in Chapter Four) considered that it was important but not essential for students to be able to perform the functional task whereas the secondary teachers considered that it was essential for students' oral language development. However, the 10-year-old high group did not find it as difficult as the low group which indicated that the ability to perform

the task was closely related to verbal ability as well as to age level. In general the results of the high and low groups at the 10-year-old level were very similar to the results of the high and low groups at the 14-year-old level which indicated that the ability to describe objects in detail and the ability to tell a story were perhaps more closely related to verbal ability than to age level.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

# THE PERFORMANCES OF DIFFERENT STUDENT GROUPS

## Introduction

The background information collected on the schools and students involved in the oracy testing program has been described in Chapter Six. The distributions of students on each of the variables used were also shown at that time. This present chapter reports the performance of different groups of students identified by the school, personal and home background data collected. Initially student performance on a wide selection of listening and speaking tasks has been described for four variables of particular interest - sex, languages spoken in the home, school location and school type. Each of these four variables has been considered separately in order to provide data comparable with that reported for literacy and numeracy in the Australian Studies in School Performance project (Keeves and Bourke, 1976:96-104). Subsequently the performances of students in other different sub-groups have been described for the total listening test and for one key speaking task selected as a significant representative of the speaking test. The speaking task chosen was that of making critical judgements when giving opinions which was common to the tests at both age levels. The background information has been collected into two groupings, school data and personal or home background data. Finally the relative importance of each of the variables within each grouping for the listening and speaking performances of various sub-groups of the sample has been identified and discussed.

## Performance by Sex

The relative performances of male and female students differed for listening and speaking and the patterns of differences varied for the two age levels tested. The percentages of male and female students succeeding on wide selections of listening and speaking tasks are shown in Table 11.1 for 10-year-old students and Table 11.2 for 14-year-old students. Listening and speaking performances will now be considered in turn.

### Listening Performance by Sex

At both age levels there were a number of tasks where more male students than female students reached the criterion level set for the sub-test used,

Table 11.1 Percentages of 10-Year-Old Students Reaching the Criterion Scores for Selected Listening and Speaking Test Tasks by Sex, Languages Spoken in the Home, School Location and School Type

| | Overall Aust. Sample | Sex | | Languages Spoken in the Home | | | | | School Location | | School Type | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | M | F | E | E/N | E/S | E/O | NoE | Metro | Non-M | G | C | I |
| Listening Test | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| * Comprehending Words and Statements | 97 | 97 | 96 | 97 | 100 | 93 | 100 | 88 | 96 | 98 | 97 | 98 | 100 |
| Understanding Instructions | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| * Comprehending Passages | 25 | 28 | 22 | 28 | 15 | 12 | 22 | 23 | 23 | 29 | 24 | 29 | 35 |
| Comprehending Conversation | 65 | 60 | 69 | 65 | 63 | 60 | 76 | 44 | 65 | 64 | 64 | 67 | 70 |
| * Comprehending in Different Situations | 47 | 45 | 48 | 51 | 40 | 28 | 30 | 12 | 49 | 44 | 46 | 50 | 59 |
| Comprehending Literal Meaning | 27 | 28 | 26 | 30 | 17 | 12 | 30 | 15 | 25 | 30 | 25 | 32 | 34 |
| Comprehending Implied Meaning | 59 | 61 | 57 | 60 | 50 | 51 | 77 | 49 | 57 | 61 | 59 | 57 | 67 |
| Making Critical Judgments | 23 | 22 | 25 | 25 | 15 | 13 | 29 | 6 | 25 | 21 | 23 | 27 | 19 |
| Recognizing Emotional Language | 23 | 22 | 24 | 25 | 30 | 10 | 16 | 12 | 24 | 23 | 22 | 29 | 16 |
| * Literal Meaning Anchor Items | 32 | 34 | 30 | 35 | 27 | 17 | 35 | 23 | 30 | 35 | 31 | 36 | 40 |
| * Total Anchor Items | 56 | 58 | 55 | 62 | 50 | 26 | 41 | 31 | 54 | 60 | 54 | 62 | 76 |
| Total Test | 62 | 61 | 63 | 67 | 53 | 35 | 48 | 33 | 60 | 65 | 60 | 66 | 87 |
| Number of Students | 1299 | 631 | 668 | 962 | 43 | 86 | 14 | 35 | 786 | 513 | 1029 | 222 | 42 |
| Speaking Test | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| * Personal details - address | 96 | 95 | 97 | 97 | 100 | 93 | 100 | 93 | 98 | 94 | 96 | 99 | 86 |
| * Personal details - date of birth | 78 | 74 | 83 | 80 | 85 | 75 | 74 | 70 | 80 | 76 | 77 | 83 | 86 |
| Giving directions - not provided | 72 | 69 | 75 | 74 | 68 | 56 | 76 | 63 | 71 | 73 | 73 | 74 | 50 |
| Giving directions - provided | 82 | 84 | 80 | 86 | 81 | 61 | 85 | 64 | 83 | 80 | 82 | 81 | 95 |
| * Sequencing - listing facts | 99 | 99 | 99 | 99 | 98 | 97 | 93 | 100 | 99 | 99 | 99 | 100 | 100 |
| * Sequencing - organizing ideas | 95 | 95 | 96 | 96 | 94 | 94 | 93 | 93 | 96 | 95 | 95 | 96 | 100 |
| * Repeating a story | 87 | 86 | 88 | 88 | 85 | 81 | 84 | 91 | 89 | 84 | 86 | 90 | 87 |
| Telling a story | 97 | 97 | 98 | 98 | 97 | 92 | 100 | 100 | 98 | 97 | 97 | 97 | 100 |
| * Opinions - repeating ideas A | 46 | 44 | 49 | 47 | 45 | 47 | 63 | 39 | 47 | 45 | 47 | 41 | 55 |
| * Opinions - critical judgments A | 63 | 60 | 65 | 66 | 67 | 49 | 38 | 50 | 65 | 60 | 61 | 68 | 67 |
| * Opinions - own ideas A | 85 | 83 | 86 | 86 | 77 | 84 | 80 | 84 | 86 | 82 | 85 | 83 | 90 |
| Conversing - give information A | 97 | 97 | 97 | 98 | 96 | 93 | 100 | 86 | 97 | 97 | 97 | 98 | 100 |
| * Conversing - give message A | 80 | 79 | 82 | 81 | 72 | 75 | 89 | 75 | 82 | 79 | 80 | 84 | 85 |
| Conversing - request information | 99 | 98 | 99 | 99 | 100 | 95 | 100 | 100 | 98 | 99 | 98 | 97 | 100 |
| Conversing - greeting adult | 71 | 67 | 76 | 74 | 58 | 63 | 99 | 57 | 71 | 72 | 71 | 71 | 88 |
| Number of Students | 1258 | 613 | 645 | 962 | 43 | 86 | 14 | 35 | 749 | 509 | 1001 | 215 | 42 |

* An asterisk indicates that a task was identical for both age levels.

Table 11.2 Percentages of 14-Year-Old Students Reaching the Criterion Scores for Selected Listening and Speaking Test Tasks by Sex, Languages Spoken in the Home, School Location and School Type

| | Overall Aust. Sample | Sex | | Languages Spoken in the Home | | | | | School Location | | School Type | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | M | F | E | E/N | E/S | E/O | NoE | Metro | Non-M | G | C | I |
| **Listening Test** | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| * Comprehending Words and Statements | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 98 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 99 | 100 |
| Understanding Instructions | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| * Comprehending Passages | 74 | 80 | 70 | 76 | 76 | 57 | 56 | 59 | 74 | 75 | 75 | 71 | 79 |
| Comprehending Long Passages | 30 | 27 | 33 | 31 | 15 | 31 | 15 | 11 | 33 | 27 | 29 | 33 | 44 |
| Comprehending Conversation | 88 | 86 | 90 | 89 | 91 | 81 | 95 | 55 | 87 | 89 | 86 | 93 | 96 |
| * Comprehending in Different Situations | 80 | 79 | 81 | 82 | 71 | 70 | 87 | 58 | 81 | 80 | 79 | 82 | 90 |
| Comprehending Literal Meaning | 43 | 44 | 42 | 46 | 32 | 25 | 0 | 21 | 42 | 45 | 42 | 44 | 53 |
| Comprehending Implied Meaning | 88 | 89 | 88 | 90 | 91 | 75 | 70 | 78 | 88 | 89 | 88 | 90 | 92 |
| Making Critical Judgments | 85 | 82 | 87 | 87 | 79 | 72 | 82 | 38 | 84 | 85 | 83 | 87 | 96 |
| Recognizing Mood | 89 | 87 | 90 | 90 | 100 | 79 | 82 | 90 | 90 | 88 | 88 | 92 | 98 |
| Recognizing Emotional Language | 88 | 86 | 89 | 90 | 87 | 73 | 95 | 74 | 88 | 88 | 87 | 89 | 97 |
| * Literal Meaning Anchor Items | 62 | 66 | 58 | 64 | 66 | 43 | 50 | 45 | 61 | 62 | 61 | 60 | 74 |
| * Total Anchor Items | 94 | 95 | 94 | 96 | 88 | 85 | 100 | 89 | 94 | 94 | 94 | 94 | 98 |
| Total Test | 79 | 79 | 79 | 82 | 76 | 61 | 82 | 45 | 79 | 79 | 78 | 81 | 88 |
| Number of Students | 1303 | 578 | 725 | 1023 | 25 | 97 | 12 | 16 | 782 | 521 | 1031 | 193 | 79 |
| **Speaking Test** | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| * Personal Details - address | 96 | 95 | 97 | 96 | 98 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 99 | 92 | 96 | 97 | 98 |
| * Personal Details - date of birth | 97 | 97 | 98 | 97 | 98 | 98 | 100 | 100 | 98 | 96 | 97 | 98 | 98 |
| Describing objects - not present | 57 | 61 | 54 | 60 | 49 | 37 | 70 | 32 | 59 | 56 | 58 | 54 | 61 |
| Giving directions - not provided | 64 | 69 | 61 | 66 | 52 | 61 | 65 | 44 | 67 | 60 | 64 | 59 | 83 |
| * Sequencing - listing facts | 99 | 99 | 100 | 99 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 99 | 99 | 100 | 99 |
| * Sequencing - organizing ideas | 98 | 99 | 98 | 98 | 100 | 96 | 100 | 100 | 99 | 98 | 98 | 99 | 98 |
| * Repeating a story | 92 | 93 | 92 | 94 | 86 | 85 | 85 | 88 | 90 | 95 | 92 | 94 | 95 |
| Telling a story | 97 | 97 | 96 | 97 | 100 | 93 | 100 | 89 | 98 | 96 | 96 | 99 | 99 |
| * Opinions - repeating ideas A | 72 | 72 | 71 | 73 | 77 | 70 | 61 | 79 | 73 | 70 | 72 | 69 | 80 |
| * Opinions - critical judgments A | 84 | 81 | 86 | 85 | 90 | 77 | 85 | 88 | 94 | 83 | 83 | 88 | 89 |
| * Opinions - own ideas A | 95 | 95 | 95 | 96 | 100 | 83 | 100 | 100 | 95 | 95 | 94 | 98 | 100 |
| Conversing - give information | 96 | 97 | 95 | 96 | 100 | 95 | 100 | 100 | 96 | 95 | 95 | 95 | 100 |
| * Conversing - give message A | 71 | 69 | 73 | 73 | 71 | 64 | 94 | 52 | 72 | 69 | 70 | 76 | 77 |
| Conversing - request information A | 45 | 45 | 45 | 45 | 47 | 39 | 48 | 30 | 47 | 42 | 45 | 49 | 41 |
| Conversing - seek employment | 53 | 52 | 54 | 54 | 41 | 46 | 24 | 43 | 52 | 54 | 55 | 46 | 50 |
| Number of Students | 1282 | 569 | 713 | 1023 | 25 | 97 | 12 | 16 | 773 | 509 | 1011 | 192 | 78 |

* An asterisk indicates that a task was identical for both age levels.

and a number of tasks where the opposite was true. Whereas there was approximately an equal division of tasks where either males or females were superior at the 10-year-old level, the female students were more frequently superior to the males at the 14-year-old level. There were also a greater number of tasks where the 14-year-old students of both sexes had approximately equal proportions succeeding when compared with the 10-year-old students.

The nature of the listening tasks where sex differences in performance were large was considered to be of some interest. Generally at both age levels there were clearly more male students who succeeded on tasks requiring literal comprehension of what was heard and more female students who were successful when the way in which something was said was important for meaning. However male students aged 10 years were superior at comprehending implied meaning, whereas female students aged 14 years were superior at the difficult task of comprehending long passages. Details of results discussed here may be observed in Tables 11.1 and 11.2. For the test taken as a whole there was no difference at the 14-year-old level in the proportions of male and female students reaching the criterion score whereas at the 10-year-old level there was a small difference which favoured the female students.

Speaking Performance by Sex

At the 10-year-old level more female students generally succeeded on the tasks reported in Table 11.1. The larger differences favouring the female students were found for the tasks of giving date of birth, giving directions not provided, giving opinions and some aspects of conversing. There were a number of tasks where the proportions of successful male and female students were approximately equal, but only one speaking task where a small sex difference in performance favoured the males. This was the task of giving directions where the directions were provided and simply required interpretation and expression by the student. The other task requiring the giving of directions was a less structured one where the directions were not provided for the student. As stated above more female students succeeded on this more prosaic but less structured task.

At the 14-year-old level the performances of male and female students were more nearly equal with the majority of tasks reported in Table 11.2 being successfully completed by approximately the same proportions of males and females. However the males were clearly superior at describing an object

and giving directions, both utilitarian tasks requiring clear description but little imagination. Conversely there were a few tasks for which the female students were superior and this was particularly true for making critical judgements when giving opinions and giving a message when conversing.

## Performance by Languages Spoken in the Home

As described in Chapter Six, students were grouped according to the languages spoken at home. Five categories of family language usage were recorded:

English only (E),
English plus a North European language (E/N),
English plus a South European language (E/S),
English plus an 'Other' language (E/O), and
No English spoken in the home (No E).

The listening and speaking performances of students in these five groups are shown in Tables 11.1 and 11.2. It should be noted that there were very few 10-year-old students from homes where English and an 'Other' language were spoken, and similarly small numbers of 14-year-old students from homes where English plus a North European language, English plus an 'Other' language or no English were spoken. Consequently only large differences in the proportions of successful students are considered in this section.

### Listening Performance by Languages Spoken

In general more students at both ages from homes where English was the only language spoken consistently reached the criterion score for the listening sub-tests reported when compared with other students. This was particularly true of the 10-year-old students where their general superiority was only infrequently matched by students from one or more of the other language groupings. Students in the English only group were matched by the English plus 'Other' language group when comprehending literal meaning, and exceeded by the English plus North European language group when required to recognize emotional language. The 10-year-old group from homes where no English was spoken had lower proportions of students who succeeded when compared with all other groups at the tasks of comprehending conversation and making critical judgements.

At the 14-year-old level the English only group was more frequently matched by one or more of the other language groups. The English only and English plus a North European language groups were superior to the other

groups for the Comprehending Passages, Comprehending Implied Meaning and the Literal Meaning Anchor Items Sub-tests. These two groups were joined by the English plus an 'Other' language group in being superior to the English plus a South European language and the no English groups for Recognizing Emotional Language Sub-test and for the listening test taken as a whole. However the English only and English plus a South European language groups were found to be superior to the other groups for the difficult task of comprehending long passages. As was the case for the 10-year-old students, fewer 14-year-old students from homes where no English was spoken were successful on the listening tasks of comprehending conversation and making critical judgements when compared with students in all other language groups.

Speaking Performance by Languages Spoken

When the speaking performances of students from the five language groups identified were compared, there were found to be fewer differences than for listening and those differences which did exist were generally smaller in magnitude. This was particularly true at the 10-year-old level with only two notable exceptions. More students in the English only and English plus a North European language groups were successful when making critical judgements, and fewer students in the English plus a South European language and the no English groups succeeded in giving adequate directions when the directions had been provided by means of a dotted line.

Fewer 14-year-old students from homes where no English was spoken were successful at the tasks of giving directions and giving a message when compared with all other students. These students were joined by students from the English plus a South European language group in having fewer successful students than the other groups when describing objects. The English plus a South European language group had fewer successful students than the other groups when giving their own ideas, and the English plus an 'Other' language group had fewer students who succeeded on the conversation task of seeking employment.

Performance by School Location

As described in Chapter Six, school location was defined as either metropolitan or non-metropolitan. The distribution of the sample of students for school location on this basis was three-fifths metropolitan and two-fifths non-metropolitan at both age levels. The patterns of results when

the performances of metropolitan and non-metropolitan students were compared were markedly different for listening and speaking but were reasonably consistent between the age levels for speaking if not for listening.

Listening Performance by School Location

Students aged 10 years attending schools in non-metropolitan areas were generally superior to students attending metropolitan schools when the listening tasks presented in Table 11.1 were considered. However there were three sub-tests for which the percentages of successful metropolitan and non-metropolitan students were approximately equal and two sub-tests where more metropolitan than non-metropolitan students were successful. The sub-tests where school location was not important were those requiring students to comprehend instructions, to comprehend conversation and to recognize emotional language. The sub-tests on which metropolitan students were superior were Comprehending in Different Situations and Making Critical Judgements. The way in which something was said was important for meaning on both of these sub-tests.

Approximately equal proportions of 14-year-old students attending metropolitan and non-metropolitan schools were successful on all except four of the listening tasks reported. More metropolitan students were successful when comprehending long passages and when recognizing mood, and more non-metropolitan students succeeded at comprehending conversation and at comprehending literal meaning. However most of these differences were small.

Speaking Performance by School Location

At both age levels students attending metropolitan schools were superior to non-metropolitan students on most tasks. Inspection of Tables 11.1 and 11.2 reveals that on eight of the tasks both the 10-year-old and 14-year-old students at metropolitan schools were superior to non-metropolitan students, that on five or six tasks metropolitan and non-metropolitan students performed approximately equally, and only on one task at each age level did more non-metropolitan students have an adequate performance. The tasks where non-metropolitan students were superior were giving directions when the directions were not provided (at the 10-year-old level), and repeating a story in their own words (at the 14-year-old level).

## Performance by School Type

Students were grouped according to the type of school they attended as described in Chapter Six. Three school types were identified - Government schools (G), Catholic schools (C) and Independent schools (I) - and the proportions of students attending these schools who were successful on the various listening and speaking tasks may be inspected in Tables 11.1 and 11.2 The relatively small number of 10-year-old students in the sample attending Independent schools requires that caution be exercised when differences in performance are discussed. The relationships between student performance by school type were quite different for the listening tasks and the speaking tasks and these are now considered separately.

### Listening Performance by School Type

The pattern of results for the two age levels was quite similar for many sub-tests with students attending Government schools having lower performance than students attending the other schools, students attending Independent schools having the highest level of performance, and students attending Catholic schools with performance between that of the other two groups. This pattern may be observed for the sub-tests concerned with comprehending conversation and comprehending in different situations and for the listening tests taken as a whole at both age levels. For the 10-year-old students the pattern was repeated for the Comprehending Passages, the Comprehending Literal Meaning, the Literal Meaning Anchor Items and the Total Anchor Items Sub-tests. The pattern was also repeated for the 14-year-old students for the Comprehending Long Passages, Making Critical Judgements and the Recognizing Mood Sub-tests.

More 10-year-old students at Independent schools than students at Government or Catholic schools were successful on the Comprehending Literal Meaning Sub-test, and 14-year-old Independent school students were superior on four sub-tests - Comprehending Literal Meaning, Recognizing Emotional Language, Literal Meaning Anchor Items and Total Anchor Items. Students aged 10 years at Catholic schools were superior to students at Government or Independent schools when Making Critical Judgements and Recognizing Emotional Language whereas students aged 14 years at Catholic schools were inferior to other students when Comprehending Passages.

## Speaking Performance by School Type

No consistent pattern of results similar to that observed for the listening sub-test and test results was observed for the various speaking tasks reported in Tables 11.1 and 11.2 for the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old students respectively. There was a slight tendency for students attending Government schools to have the lowest level of performance and students attending Independent schools to have the highest level of performance as was noted for the listening tasks, but there were many speaking tasks at both age levels where this did not apply. For example there were two tasks at the 10-year-old level and one task at the 14-year-old level where students from Independent schools had a lower level of performance than students from Government and Catholic schools. These were the tasks of giving address and giving directions (not provided) for 10-year-old students, and requesting information for 14-year-old students. Another exception was found at the 14-year-old level where students at Government schools were superior to all other students in conversations when seeking employment. There were also several tasks at both age levels where there were no differences or very small differences in speaking performance between students attending the three types of schools.

## Student Performance by School Variables

As stated in Chapter Six, some of the background information collected for each student in the sample related to the school experiences of the student that were considered likely to be related to his performance in listening or speaking. These variables were concerned with school characteristics such as size, staff experience and turnover, various aspects of the schools' language development program and the identification of students with learning difficulties. The distributions of results on the listening and speaking tests are first considered separately for each of the school variables for those students for whom there were no missing data. The variables are then considered together in analyses used to determine their relative importance for the listening and speaking performances of the 10 and 14-year-old students.

### School Size

School size was measured by the number of full time teachers at the school. Two different scales for grouping the numbers of teachers into categories were needed for primary and secondary schools. These scales are shown in Table 11.3 together with the proportions of successful students attending

Table 11.3 School Size by Performance in Listening and Speaking for 10-and 14-Year-Old Students

| School Size (Category) | | 10-Year-Olds Successful | | | 14-Year-Olds Successful | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | No. of Teachers | List % | Speak % | No. of Teachers | List % | Speak % |
| 1 | Very small | 1- 5 | 63 | 39 | 2-19 | 69 | 79 |
| 2 | Small | 6-10 | 60 | 68 | 20-29 | 69 | 85 |
| 3 | Small/Medium | 11-15 | 63 | 65 | 30-39 | 80 | 95 |
| 4 | Medium | 16-20 | 59 | 62 | 40-49 | 73 | 86 |
| 5 | Medium | 21-25 | 57 | 58 | 50-59 | 82 | 88 |
| 6 | Large | 26-30 | 62 | 65 | 60-69 | 81 | 83 |
| 7 | Large | 31-42 | 61 | 59 | 70-79 | 80 | 80 |
| 8 | Very large | - | | | 80+ | 75 | 77 |
| Number of Students[a] | | | 1041 | 998 | | 904 | 858 |

a These numbers are the same for Tables 11.4 to 11.10 but are not repeated there.

schools in each category. The proportions of students in each category from the total 10 and 14-year-old samples were given in Table 6.4.

There was little variation in the proportions of 10-year-old students succeeding on the listening test according to school size but more variation for speaking. In particular students attending very small schools with from one to five teachers performed poorly on the speaking test item. There was more variation in the proportions of successful 14-year-old students from schools of different sizes for both listening and speaking. However the relationships were clearly not linear and require close consideration when the importance of school size is compared with other variables for specific groups of students.

Average Teacher Time at the School

The proportions of students succeeding in listening and speaking in relation to the average teacher time at their school are shown in Table 11.4. There was no consistent relationship between teacher time at the school and performance in listening at either age level but a clear trend was evident for speaking at both age levels. As the average length of time teachers had been at the school increased, higher proportions of students succeeded on the important speaking task of making critical judgements. The larger difference was found for 10-year-old students where there were 41 per cent of successful students at schools where the average teacher time at the

Table 11.4 Average Teacher Time at the School and Total Teaching Experience by the Proportions of Successful Students in Listening and Speaking

| Ave. Time at School & Total Experience | Time at School | | | | Total Experience | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
| | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % |
| Less than 1 year | 60 | 41 | 66 | 74 | 50 | -[a] | 56 | 70 |
| Between 1 & 2 years | 58 | 59 | 76 | 81 | 53 | 39 | 76 | 69 |
| More than 2 but less than 5 years | 63 | 65 | 79 | 88 | 58 | 58 | 76 | 85 |
| Between 5 & 10 years | 60 | 68 | 72 | 94 | 63 | 65 | 79 | 88 |

a Only three students were in this group.

school was less than one year, and 68 per cent successful at schools where the average teacher time at the school was between five and ten years. For 14-year-old students the corresponding proportions were 74 per cent and 94 per cent, a smaller but still substantial difference. It could be anticipated that there would be a relationship between average teacher time at a school and teacher age and experience. Although data on age of teachers was not collected, average total teacher experience was recorded.

Average Total Teacher Experience

There was a consistent pattern of differences in the proportions of successful students for listening and speaking at both age levels in relation to the average total length of experience of teachers at the school. The more experienced teachers were, the higher proportions of students who were successful on the listening and speaking tests. The trend was stronger and more consistent for the 14-year-old students. The proportions of students are shown in Table 11.4.

The School's Language Development Program

Aspects of the school's language development program considered here are the sources of the program, the stated importance of oracy compared with literacy, and the use of tape recorders, radio and television in the program.

Sources of the Program. Potential major sources of a school's English language development program were identified as the District or wider grouping of schools (for example, a centrally-prepared State syllabus), the school itself, a group of teachers within the school, and the individual teacher. The performances of students attending schools where each of these

Table 11.5 Relationships Between Major Sources of School Programs and the Proportions of Successful Students for Listening and Speaking

| Major Input to Program | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % |
| District or wider | 63 | 58 | 73 | 76 |
| School | 60 | 63 | 75 | 84 |
| Group of teachers (or language department) | 55 | 58 | 77 | 84 |
| Individual teacher | 61 | 64 | 80 | 85 |
| Total (Sub-samples) | 61 | 62 | 76 | 84 |

sources was a major contributor to the school's program are shown in Table 11.5. There did not seem to be a consistent trend across age levels for either listening or speaking. The largest difference in the proportion of successful students (when compared with the proportion of successful students for the total sub-sample for whom school information was available) was for secondary schools which indicated that the district or wider grouping made a major input to their language development program. In this case only 76 per cent of 14-year-old students were successful on the speaking task compared with 84 per cent who were successful for the total sub-sample. Most of the other differences were small. In these cases individual schools, groups of teachers and individual teachers were stated to have made a major contribution to the program.

The Importance of Oracy in the Program. Schools were asked to rate the importance of developing listening and speaking abilities in the language program compared with the importance of developing reading and writing abilities. Two ratings were requested: the relative importance of oracy ideally, and the relative importance actually in the school's program were sought. The proportions of students succeeding in listening and speaking according to the school's priorities in their language development program are shown in Table 11.6. There was a fairly consistent tendency for students to have higher performance in schools where oracy was said to be less important than literacy ideally than in schools where oracy was said to be more important ideally. However this was not true for the speaking performance of the 14-year-old students where there was a small difference in the opposite direction. In general observed differences in proportions

Table 11.6 The Relationship Between the Importance of Oracy Ideally and Actually and the Proportions of Successful Students in Listening and Speaking

| Compared with Reading and Writing | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % |
| Ideally | | | | |
| Less important | 67 | 67 | 87 | 83 |
| Equal importance | 61 | 62 | 76 | 83 |
| More important | 61 | 59 | 73 | 88 |
| Actually | | | | |
| Less important | 59 | 61 | 78 | 84 |
| Equal importance | 63 | 63 | 69 | 84 |
| More important | 71 | 56 | 83 | 83 |

of successful students were small. When opinions of the actual importance of oracy were given, there was a tendency for students at schools where oracy was stated to be less important to have lower performance in listening, but not speaking, than students at schools where oracy was considered to have more actual importance than literacy. Again most differences were small.

School Use of Tape Recorders, Radio and Television. The overall school use of tape and cassette recorders, radio and television in the language development program has been recorded in Table 6.10. Where necessary the categories shown in that table have been collapsed into three because of the very small numbers of 14-year-old students at schools where radio was used most days. The categories used in this section may be seen in Table 11.7 where the proportions of successful students are shown according to the overall school use of tape recorders, radio and television. There was no identifiable trend in the performance of the 14-year-old students in relation to the school's use of tape recorders, radio or television. However for the 10-year-old students there was a tendency for decreasing school use of radio and television to be related to lower listening performance, and for decreasing use of recorders and television to be related to lower speaking performance.

Availability and Individual Use of Tape Recorders. The availability of tape or cassette recorders in the school was measured by the number of

Table 11.7 The Relationships Between Overall School Use of Tape Recorders, Radio and Television and Proportions of Successful Students for Listening and Speaking

| Overall School Use of: | 10-Year-Olds List % | 10-Year-Olds Speak % | 14-Year-Olds List % | 14-Year-Olds Speak % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Recorders | | | | |
| Most days | 60 | 63 | 83 | 91 |
| About weekly | 62 | 62 | 70 | 83 |
| Every now and again | 59 | 59 | 77 | 83 |
| Rarely or never | 62 | 56 | 77 | 87 |
| Radio | | | | |
| Most days | 73 | 68 | 74 | 85 |
| About weekly | 57 | 58 | | |
| Every now and again | 63 | 65 | 74 | 84 |
| Rarely or never | 58 | 59 | 78 | 84 |
| Television | | | | |
| Most days | 71 | 64 | 76 | 86 |
| About weekly | 60 | 63 | 80 | 86 |
| Every now and again | 59 | 61 | 77 | 82 |
| Rarely or never | 54 | 47 | 71 | 86 |

recorders for each ten teachers in the school. The five categories for availability of recorders shown in Table 6.9 were collapsed because of the small numbers of students in some categories. Because of the lower availability of tape recorders in secondary schools the categories were collapsed differently for the 10-year-old and the 14-year-old student samples. The new categories may be observed in Table 11.8 in relation to listening and speaking performance. Individual student use of a tape recorder in his language program is also shown in this table and the categories used are consistent with those for overall school use in Table 11.7. There were no trends in the 14-year-old students' performance related to the availability or individual student use of tape recorders except that increasing individual use of tape recorders seemed to be related to lower listening performance. The opposite was true for the listening performance of the 10-year-old students where higher listening performance was associated with more frequent use. Availability of tape recorders was related to both listening and speaking performance by the 10-year-old students: higher availability was associated with higher proportions of successful students.

Table 11.8 Availability and Individual Student Use of Tape Recorders by Proportions of Successful Students for Listening and Speaking

| Availability and Individual Use of Recorders | | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % |
| No. Recorders/10 Teachers | | | | | |
| Age 10 | Age 14 | | | | |
| 0-5 | 0-2 | 60 | 58 | 76 | 83 |
| 6-10 | 3-5 | 61 | 62 | 77 | 85 |
| 11+ | 6+ | 64 | 72 | 75 | 82 |
| Individual Use | | | | | |
| Most days | | 84 | 58 | -[a] | -[a] |
| About weekly | | 86 | 64 | 63 | 88 |
| Every now and again | | 61 | 63 | 74 | 83 |
| Rarely or never | | 58 | 59 | 78 | 85 |

a Only one or two students in this category.

Identification of Learning Difficulties

Teachers were asked to identify students who had either minor or major problems in listening or speaking. The listening and speaking performances of these students are shown in comparison with students judged not to have these problems in Table 11.9. Students considered to have listening problems are compared on listening performance and students with speaking problems are compared on speaking performance in this table. The very small numbers of students whom teachers stated were receiving remedial help outside normal classroom lessons meant that this variable could not be used to compare student performance. The proportions of students in the categories of perceived problems and receipt of help have been recorded in Table 6.13.

There were strong relationships between teacher perceptions of individual problems and student performance at both age levels for both listening and speaking. The strongest relationships were found for listening and for the 10-year-old students. Whereas almost two-thirds of the 10-year-old students with no apparent problems were successful on the listening test, almost a half with a minor problem and only a quarter with a major problem were successful. The weakest of these relationships was that for the speaking performance of the 14-year-old students but even here there was a considerable difference in the proportions of successful

Table 11.9 Perceived Individual Listening and Speaking Problems by the Proportions of Successful Students in Listening and Speaking (Respectively)

| Perceived Problem Listening or Speaking | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % |
| None apparent | 64 | 64 | 79 | 85 |
| Minor problem | 49 | 52 | 69 | 82 |
| Major problem | 25 | 32 | 43 | 63 |

students: 85 per cent of those with no apparent speaking problem were successful compared with 63 per cent of those who were considered by their English language teacher to have a major problem.

Year Level of Student

The Year level of students is decided, at least in part, by policies on age of entry to schooling and promotion through the grades. This variable had a consistent relationship with performance in listening and speaking at both age levels and was particularly strong for listening. It was also stronger for the 10-year-old students than for the 14-year-olds (see Table 11.10).

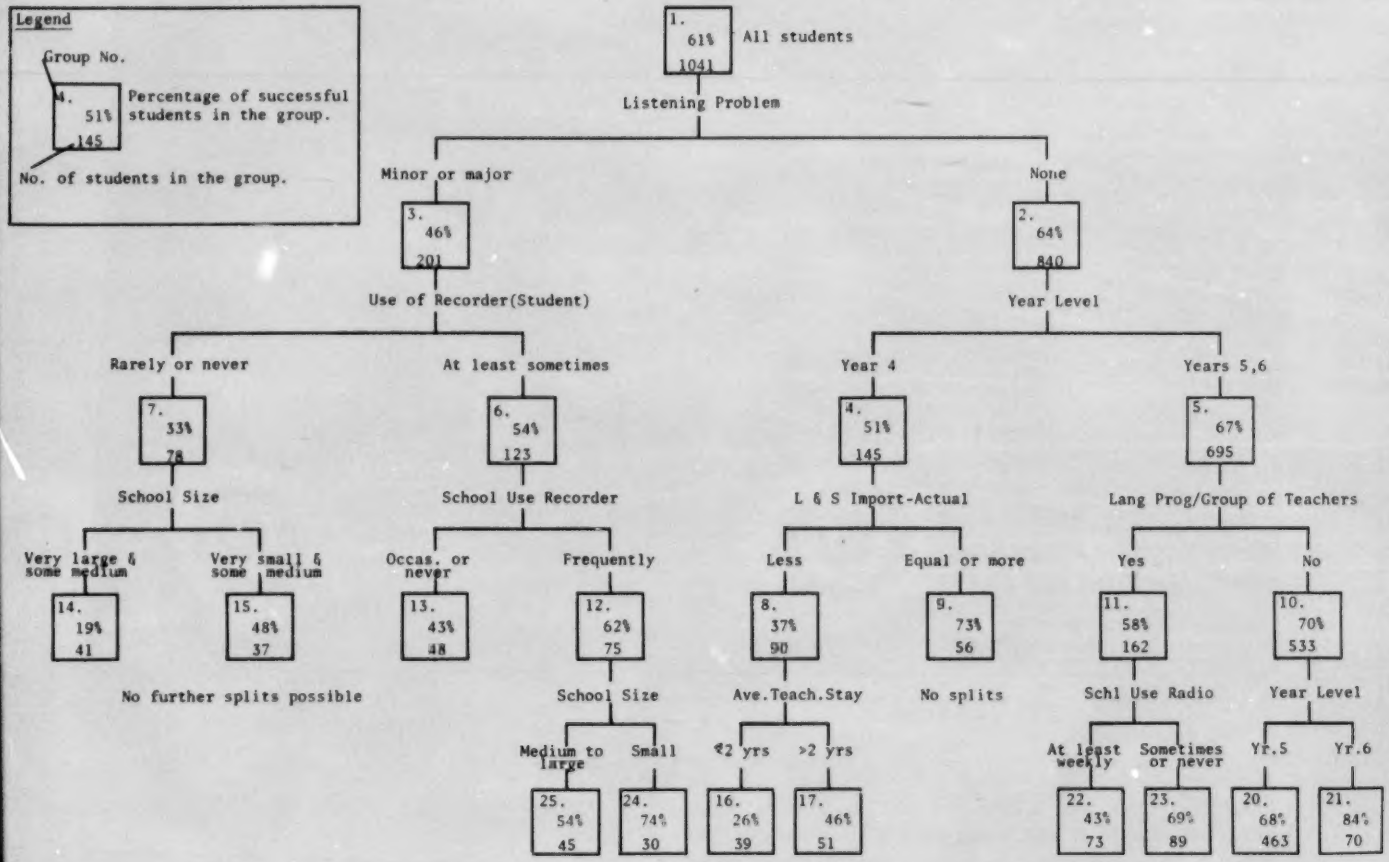
The Relative Importance of School Variables

Thaid analyses were used to determine the most important predictor variables for the listening and speaking criterion variables. For listening the criterion variable used was total listening test performance and the criterion variable for speaking was performance as measured by the task of making critical judgements. The use of the THAID technique in this way was described and explained by Bourke and Keeves (1977:81-82). Briefly, from the original sub-samples of students without missing data for any of the variables to be used in the analysis, two sub-groups are formed so that the

Table 11.10 The Relationship Between Year Level of Student and the Proportions of Successful Students in Listening and Speaking

| Year Level[a] | | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age 10 | Age 14 | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % |
| 4 | 8 | 46 | 54 | 68 | 79 |
| 5 | 9 | 62 | 61 | 78 | 85 |
| 6 | 10 | 81 | 79 | 86 | 89 |

a The small numbers of 10 and 14-year-old students in Year 7 have been recoded to Years 6 and 8 respectively.






gure 11.1 THAID Analysis: School Variables as Predictors of Success on the Total Listening Test by 10-Year-Old Students

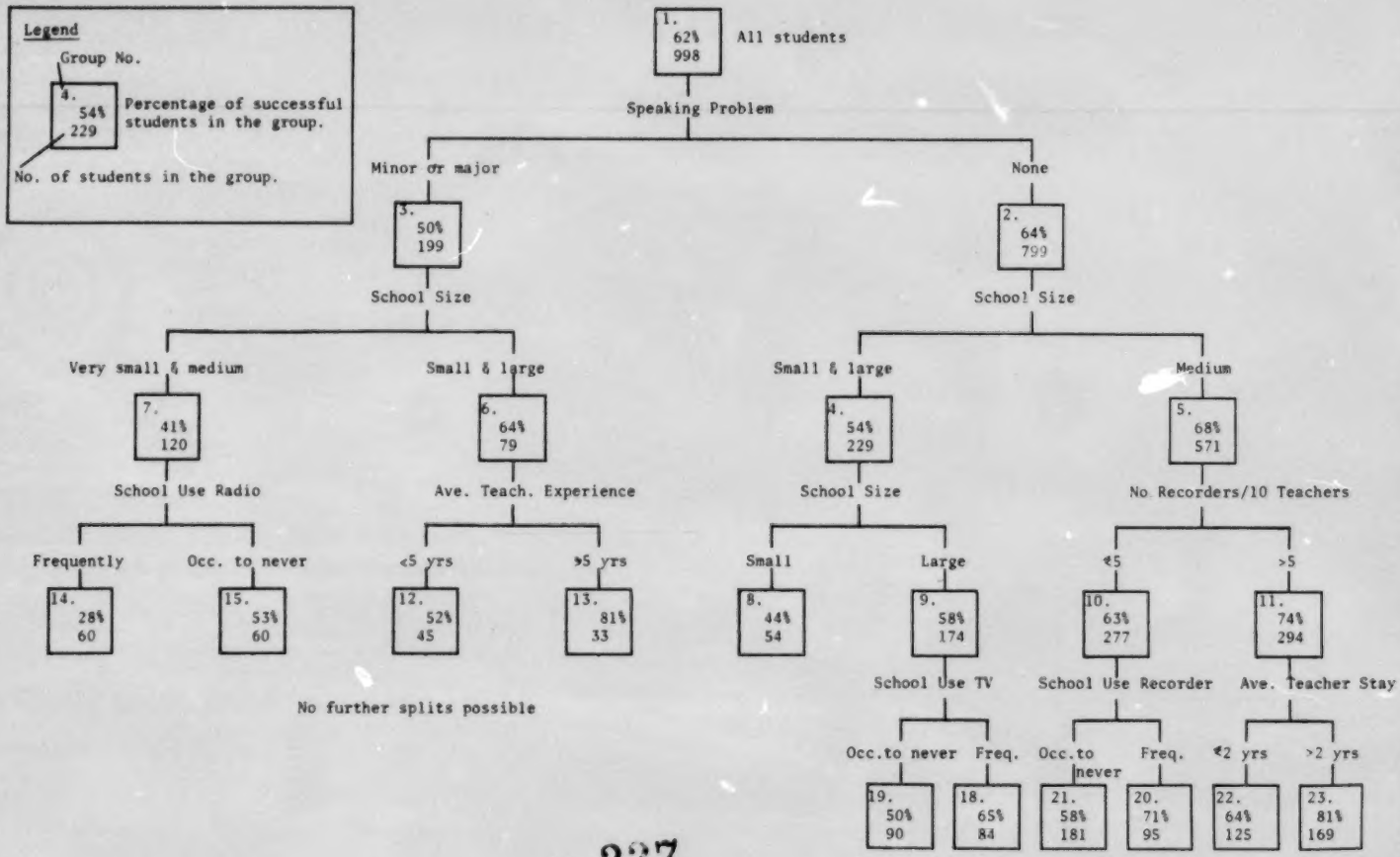





Figure 11.2 THAID Analysis: School Variables as Predictors of Success on the Speaking Test Item (Making Critical Judgements) by 10-Year-Old Students.

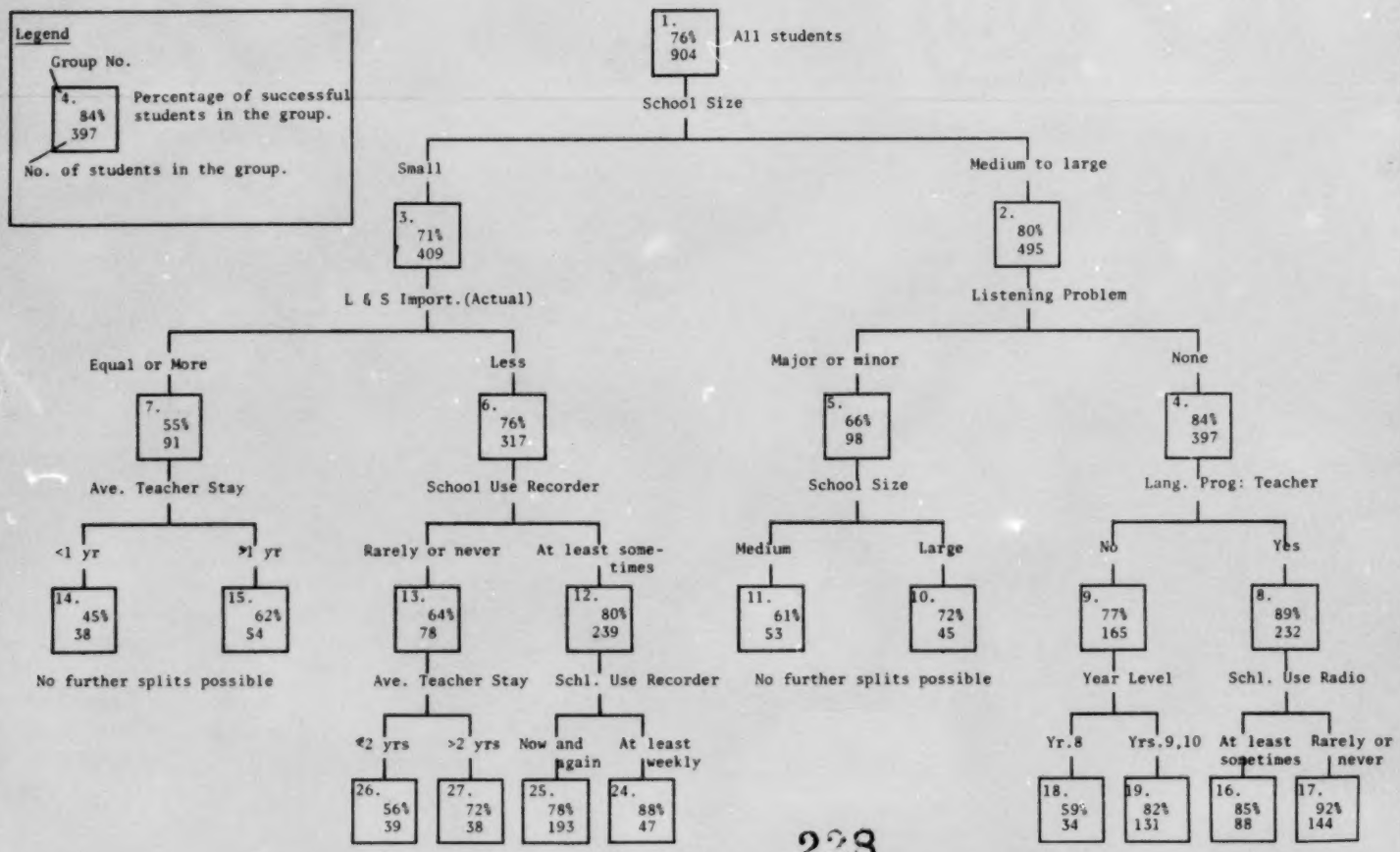
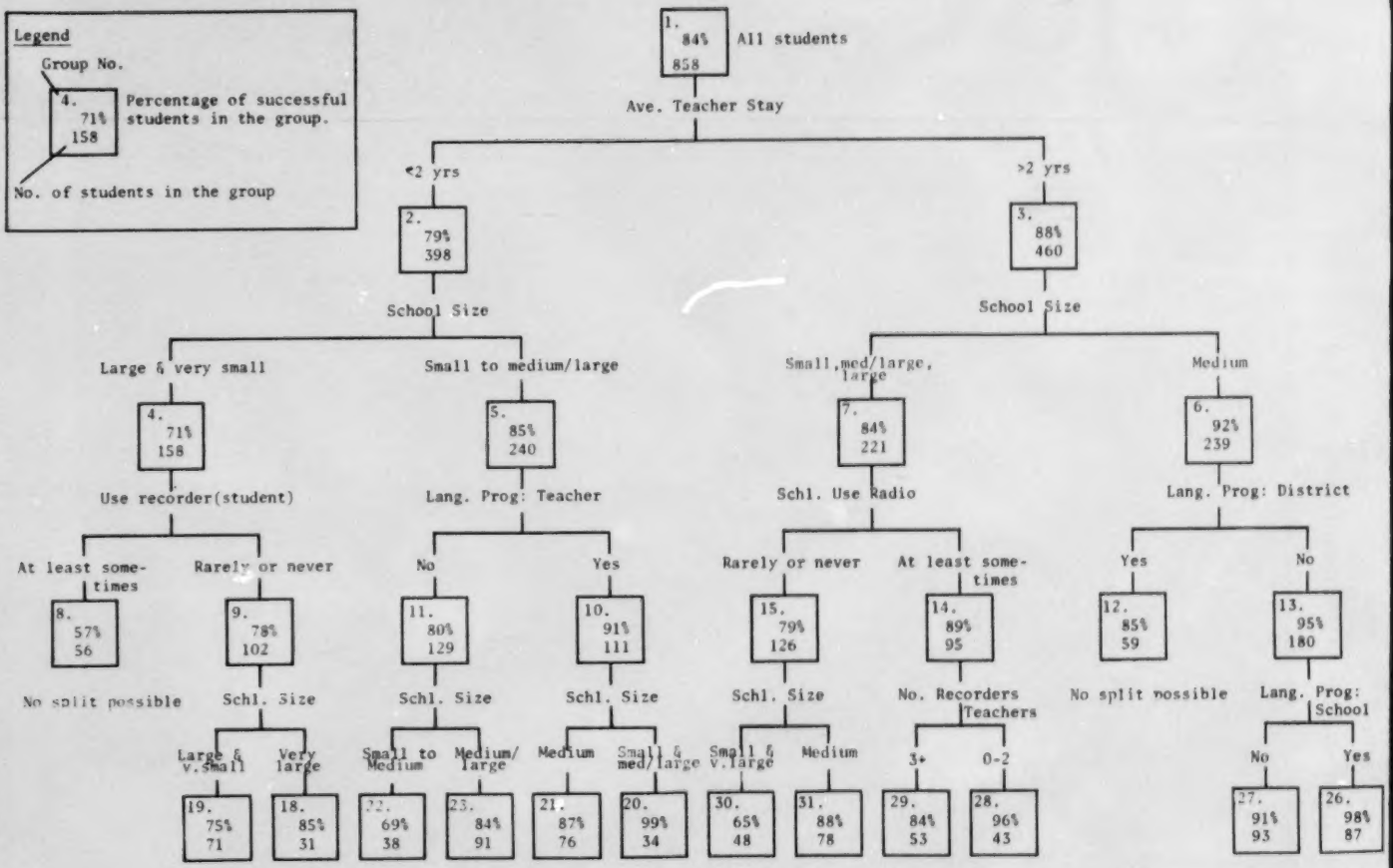





Figure 11.3 THAID Analysis: School Variables as Predictors of Success on the Total Listening Test by 14-Year-Old Students






ure 11.4 THAID Analysis: School Variables as Predictors of Success on the Speaking Test Item (Making Critical Judgements) by 14-Year-Old Students

difference between the sub-groups is maximised with respect to the criterion variable. As stated in this case there are two criterion variables, the proportions of successful students on listening and on speaking at each of two age levels. These sub-groups are then split in the same way for up to four successive splits. Thus the possible number of sub-groups in each analysis for which the predictor variables can be examined is 16. However in these analyses the minimum number of students permitted in a sub-group was 30, so an analysis frequently resulted in fewer than 16 groups. The results of the THAID analyses are shown in the branching diagrams illustrated in Figures 11.1 to 11.4 for the different criterion variables and for the different age levels.

10-Year-Old Students: Listening as the Criterion. Figure 11.1 illustrates the most important predictor variable at each stage of the analysis where the criterion variable was success on the total listening test by the 10-year-old students. For the total sample the most important variable was whether students had been identified as having a problem in listening. Other variables that were important in this analysis were Year level, student use of a tape recorder, whether a group of teachers at the school made a major contribution to the language program, school size and the other variables shown in the figure. The highest group of students on the criterion was the group of 70 students (Group 21) who were not considered to have a listening problem and who were in Year 6 at schools where a group of teachers at the school did not make a major contribution to the language program. Of this group of students, 84 per cent were successful on the total listening test. The lowest group (Group 14) consisted of those students at very large or medium-sized schools who were considered to have either a major or minor listening problem and who rarely or never used a recorder in their language program. Only 19 per cent of these 41 students were successful in reaching the criterion of successful performance on the total listening test.

10-Year-Old Students: Speaking as the Criterion. The same information with speaking as the criterion is shown in Figure 11.2. Although the most important variable for the total group was whether the student was perceived to have a speaking problem, when all the other splits were considered the most consistently important variable was school size. Similar proportions of students from particularly large schools and small schools were successful when compared with the proportion of successful students for the total sample, while students with a speaking problem from very small and medium schools had a much lower performance and students

with no apparent speaking problem who attended medium-sized schools had a higher level of performance. More frequent use of a tape recorder, greater availability of a tape recorder, more frequent use of television, greater teacher experience and length of teachers' stay at the school were all related to higher performance for some specific groups of students. However less frequent school use of a radio was related to higher performance for one particular group of 60 students (Group 15).

14-Year-Old Students: Listening as the Criterion. Figure 11.3 shows that school size was the most important variable for the total group of 904 students included in this analysis. It was also the most important variable when all four levels of split were considered. Students attending medium to large schools were more frequently successful than students attending small schools. Where students were considered to have a listening problem (Group 5 in the figure), students at large schools had a higher success rate than students at medium-sized schools. Other variables important for listening by the 14-year-old students were the actual importance of oracy when compared with literacy (surprisingly less importance being associated with a higher proportion of successful students at small schools), and the school's use of a tape recorder (in these cases more frequent use was associated with higher proportions of successful students). Involvement of individual teachers in medium to large schools in the development of the language program was related to student success on the listening test (Group 4), as was the time teachers had been at the school for different groups of students at small schools (Groups 7 and 13). School use of a radio was again negatively related to performance for one group of high performing students (Group 8).

14-Year-Old Students: Speaking as the Criterion. Whereas the average time teachers had stayed at the school was the most important variable for the total group of students (with increase in time at the school being linked with a higher proportion of successful students), school size was responsible for no fewer than six splits, including both of the level two splits. In those cases where average teacher time at the school was not more than two years, and the individual teacher was a major contributor to the language program, almost all students (99 per cent) at small and medium/large schools were successful on the speaking task used as the criterion (Group 20). However where the individual teacher was not a major contributor to the program being taught, only 69 per cent of students at small to medium-sized schools were successful (Group 22). It should be noted that

although Groups 20 and 22 were small groups consisting of only 34 and 38 students respectively, the importance of the individual teacher as a source of the language program was related to the performance of a much larger group of 240 students (Group 5). When average teacher time at the school did exceed two years, school size was also important as was the school's use of radio (where some use was related to a higher level of performance than rare or no use), and the role of the district or wider grouping in providing the school's language program (performance was higher when the district was not involved). However involvement of the school in the development of the program was related to higher performance by a group of already highly performing students (Group 13). Figure 11.4 displays this analysis.

Summary for School Variables

It would seem to be clear that the variable responsible for most splits was school size. However the relationships between school size and listening and speaking performances were not consistent, being very dependent each time upon the composition of the specific group of students concerned. Other consistently important variables were length of teacher stay or time at the school, school use of a tape or cassette recorder and school use of radio. Longer teacher time at the school was associated with higher proportions of successful students as was more frequent school use of a recorder but less frequent use of radio. Other variables that were important for listening were perceived listening problems and the importance of oracy compared with literacy. For speaking, teacher identification of a speaking problem and the availability of recorders were also important for success when making critical judgements. Three variables that were relatively unimportant but did cause one split each were the school's involvement in developing the language program taught, school usage of television in the program, and average teacher experience. The splits caused by these variables were related to speaking but not to listening performance.

Student Performance by Personal and Home Variables

Some of the background data collected for each student, such as sex, age and place in family, was personal information considered likely to be important for the student's performance in listening and speaking. Other data such as father's and family occupation, size of family, country of birth of the student and his parents, school attendance, languages spoken in the home, and type and location of school attended, was home or family

Table 11.11 Age of Student by Proportions of Successful Students in Listening and Speaking

| Age in Years | No. of Students | | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Age 10 | Age 14 | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % |
| 10:0-10:1/14:0-14:1 | 134 | 143 | 61 | 60 | 78 | 90 |
| 10:2-10:3/14:2-14:3 | 205 | 244 | 61 | 65 | 78 | 88 |
| 10:4-10:5/14:4-14:5 | 254 | 229 | 61 | 64 | 81 | 87 |
| 10:6-10:7/14:6-14:7 | 242 | 259 | 62 | 59 | 85 | 87 |
| 10:8-10:9/14:8-14:9 | 233 | 232 | 63 | 67 | 76 | 81 |
| 10:10-10:11/14:10-14:11 | 229 | 197 | 70 | 70 | 79 | 81 |
| Number of Students[a] | | | 688 | 670 | 765 | 746 |

a These numbers are the same for Tables 11.12 to 11.15 and consist of all students for whom there was no missing data on any of the personal or home background variables.

background information also thought to be important for oral language development. Information on student performance by sex, by languages spoken in the home, by location and by the type of school parents selected for their child to attend, has been provided and discussed in detail earlier in this chapter and will not be repeated here. However information on each of the other personal and home background variables is given in this section in relation to student performance in listening and in speaking. The distribution of students on each of these variables may be observed in Chapter Six. Subsequently all variables, including sex, languages spoken, location and school type, are considered together in analyses to determine their relative importance for listening and speaking at both age levels.

Age of Student

Students were fairly evenly spread across the 12 month age span of the samples at both the 10 and the 14-year-old levels as can be seen by the numbers of students in the total sample shown for each age category in Table 11.11. Differences in listening and speaking performances of students in the various age categories were generally small and inconsistent. There was however a clear trend in the speaking performance of the 14-year-old students where higher proportions of the younger students were successful compared with the older students. Conversely in the case of the 10-year-old students more of the oldest students were successful in both listening and speaking when compared with younger students.

Table 11.12 Relationships of Family Size and Place by Size of Family with Proportions of Successful Students in Listening and Speaking

| Family Size and Place by Size Family | | 10-Year-Olds List % | 10-Year-Olds Speak % | 14-Year-Olds List % | 14-Year-Olds Speak % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family Size | | | | | |
| 1 child | | 55 | 74 | 51[a] | 70[a] |
| 2 children | | 62 | 69 | 87 | 86 |
| 3 children | | 69 | 61 | 79 | 86 |
| 4 children | | 58 | 58 | 77 | 86 |
| 5 children | | 65 | 63 | 84 | 85 |
| 6 children | | 68 | 71 | 75 | 89 |
| 7 children | | 45[a] | 67 | 75 | 87 |
| 8 or more children | | 58 | 73 | 70 | 84 |
| Place by Size Family | Category | | | | |
| 1st out of 1, 2 or 3 | 0 | 64 | 70 | 81 | 87 |
| 2nd out of 2 or 3 | 1 | 64 | 60 | 81 | 82 |
| 3rd out of 3 | 2 | 69 | 66 | 80 | 90 |
| 1st out of 4 or 5 | 3 | 69 | 65 | 80 | 81 |
| 2nd or 3rd out of 4 or 5 | 4 | 60 | 59 | 75 | 84 |
| 4th or 5th out of 4 or 5 | 5 | 56 | 57 | 86 | 89 |
| 1st to 3rd out of 6 or more | 6 | 61 | 26[a] | 79 | 83 |
| 4th or 5th out of 6 or more | 7 | 65 | 83[a] | 55[a] | 97[a] |
| 6th or more out of 6 or more | 8 | 58 | 81 | 78 | 84 |

a There were fewer than 30 students in this group.

Family Size and Student Place by Size of Family

The performance of students when related to family size and to their place by size of family are shown in Table 11.12. Families were grouped into small (one to three children), medium (four or five children) and large (six or more children), and students were identified as being an older, middle or younger child for each of these sizes of families.

With the exception of those groups where there were small numbers of students, the proportions of students succeeding on the listening test and the speaking task revealed no clear trend for either family size or place by size of family for the total samples of 10 and 14-year-old students. Possible relationships of these variables with performance of specific groups of students will be considered later in this section.

Table 11.13 Father's and Family Occupation by Proportions of Successful Students in Listening and Speaking

| Group No. | Occupational Classification | No. of Students | | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Age 10 | Age 14 | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % |
| | Father | | | | | | |
| 6 | Professional | 129 | 171 | 71 | 72 | 88 | 91 |
| 5 | Managerial | 123 | 226 | 64 | 75 | 85 | 89 |
| 4 | White collar | 94 | 119 | 75 | 64 | 82 | 92 |
| 3 | Skilled manual | 261 | 221 | 60 | 60 | 78 | 81 |
| 2 | Semi-skilled manual | 204 | 193 | 56 | 65 | 69 | 78 |
| 1 | Unskilled manual | 207 | 160 | 63 | 64 | 75 | 84 |
| | Family | | | | | | |
| 6 | Professional | 202 | 225 | 76 | 74 | 89 | 90 |
| 5 | Managerial | 117 | 206 | 65 | 65 | 84 | 89 |
| 4 | White collar | 140 | 188 | 73 | 65 | 74 | 90 |
| 3 | Skilled manual | 228 | 185 | 55 | 57 | 81 | 80 |
| 2 | Semi-skilled manual | 227 | 190 | 54 | 65 | 68 | 79 |
| 1 | Unskilled manual | 187 | 133 | 62 | 63 | 77 | 83 |

Father's and Family Occupation

The distribution of students according to their father's and mother's occupations were given in Table 6.20 on a six-point occupational classification scale. Family occupation has been formed from these two variables by taking the higher of father's and mother's occupations. For most students, therefore, father's occupation and family occupation will be the same, but it was considered to be useful to determine which variable was more closely related to student performance in listening and in speaking. The distributions of students in these variables and of their performances are shown in Table 11.13.

In general differences in the proportions of successful students were not large, but there were some fairly consistent trends. Students whose fathers were in semi-skilled manual occupations tended to have slightly lower performances and, at the 10-year-old level were accompanied by students whose fathers were in skilled manual occupations. There was also a tendency for 14-year-old students whose fathers were in managerial or professional occupations to have higher performance. The same was true for

Table 11.14 Relationships of Country of Birth of Father and Mother with Proportions of Successful Students in Listening and Speaking

| Country of Birth Birth | 10-Year-Olds List % | 10-Year-Olds Speak % | 14-Year-Olds List % | 14-Year-Olds Speak % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Father | | | | |
| English-speaking | 66 | 66 | 83 | 86 |
| Non-English-speaking | 50 | 60 | 64 | 83 |
| Mother | | | | |
| English-speaking | 66 | 66 | 83 | 85 |
| Non-English-speaking | 48 | 58 | 63 | 87 |

speaking in the case of the 10-year-old students. For family occupation a tendency for higher performance to be associated with higher status occupations was clearer, but the trend was not linear with sometimes students from semi-skilled manual occupation families, sometimes skilled manual and sometimes white collar occupation families having the lowest proportion of successful students. The relationships between father's and family occupation and student performance in listening and speaking should be clearer when specific student groups are considered.

Country of Birth of Students, Father and Mother

As very few students in the samples were born outside Australia, country of birth of students is not considered further in this section. Similarly as almost all students had spent all their life in Australia, number of years in Australia has also been dropped as a variable. Although there were much higher proportions of parents born outside Australia, many were born in other English-speaking countries (see Table 6.17 for the distributions of country of birth). Consequently performances in listening and speaking are reported here (in Table 11.14) for students with parents born in English-speaking countries (including Australia) and non-English speaking countries only.

For the 10-year-old students it was clear that when either parent was born in an English-speaking country, student performance was higher. The differences in proportions of successful students were much higher for both father's and mother's country of birth in the case of listening performance than for speaking. For the 14-year-old students the differences were similar for listening with much higher proportions of students with parents

Table 11.15 School Attendance by Proportions of Successful Students in Listening and Speaking

| Attendance (days absent) | 10-Year-Olds | | 14-Year-Olds | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | List % | Speak % | List % | Speak % |
| 0 | 72 | 70 | 77 | 86 |
| 1 - 2 | 63 | 59 | 79 | 90 |
| 3 - 5 | 66 | 65 | 82 | 88 |
| 6 - 10 | 58 | 66 | 81 | 79 |
| 11 - 15 | 62 | 67 | 79 | 92 |
| 16+ | 60 | 61 | 70 | 75 |

from English-speaking countries being successful on the total test. However the differences for speaking were very small and, although more students were successful if their fathers had been born in English-speaking countries, slightly fewer students were successful if their mothers had been born in English-speaking countries.

School Attendance

The distribution of student listening and speaking performance for the six categories of attendance recorded in Table 6.12 are shown in Table 11.15. The number of days absent in the first two terms of 1978 were used to assess attendance. Differences in the proportions of successful students were not large and not wholly consistent. However there was a tendency for greater proportions of students with high attendance to be successful when compared with the proportions of successful students with low attendance. The results for students with moderate attendance were variable.

The Relative Importance of Personal and Home Variables

Thaid analyses were performed in the same manner already described for school variables in order to determine the relative importance of the personal and home variables for the total samples of students, and then for specified sub-groups of students formed by the analyses. The results are illustrated in Figures 11.5 to 11.8 for the two age levels of students and for the criteria of listening and speaking.

10-Year-Old Students: Listening as the Criterion. Family occupation was the most important variable for the total sample of 10-year-old students, with those from higher status families having a much higher performance than students from lower status families. Family language or language

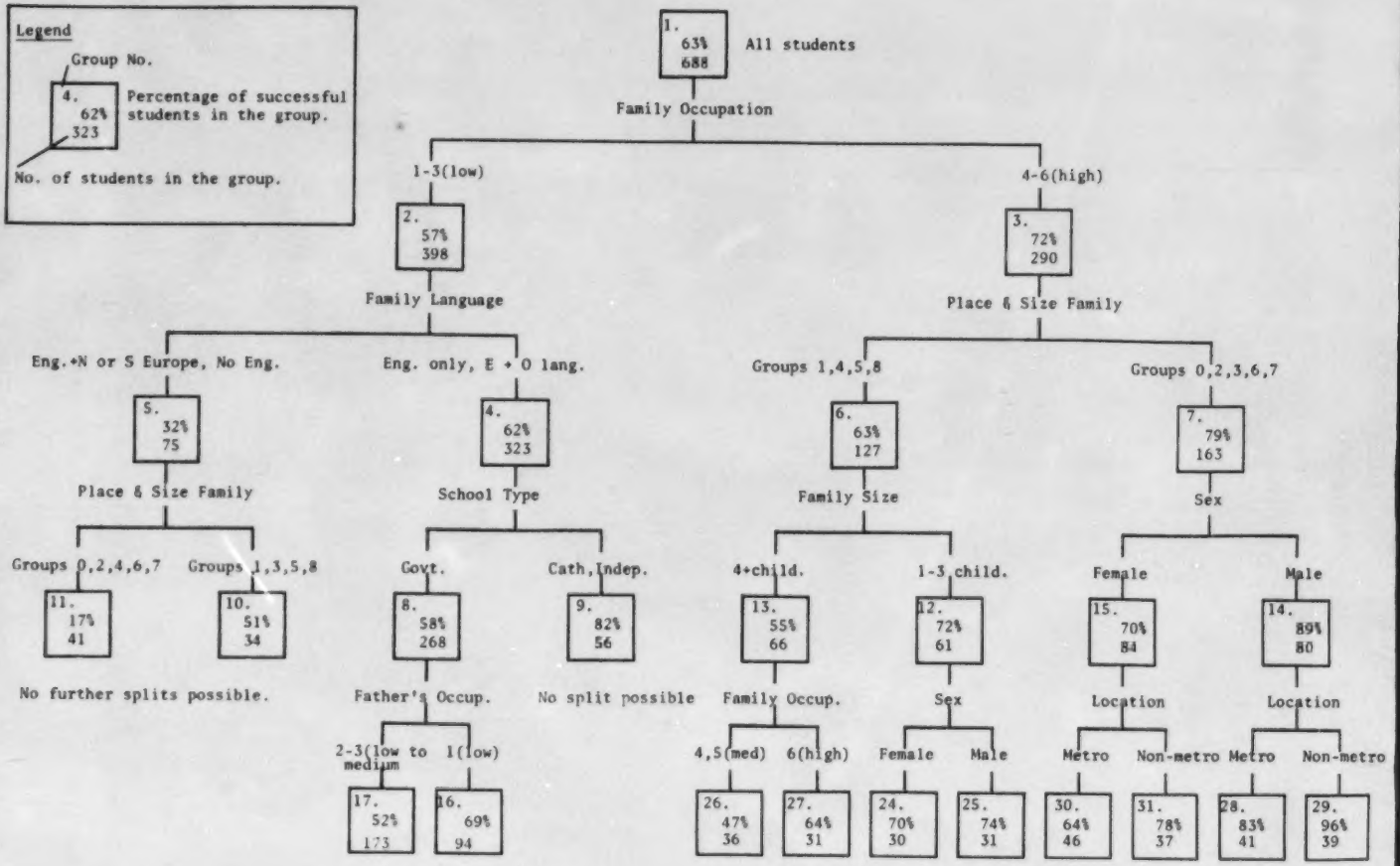





Figure 11.5 THAID Analysis: Personal and Home Background Variables as Predictors of Success on the Total Listening Test by 10-Year-Old Students

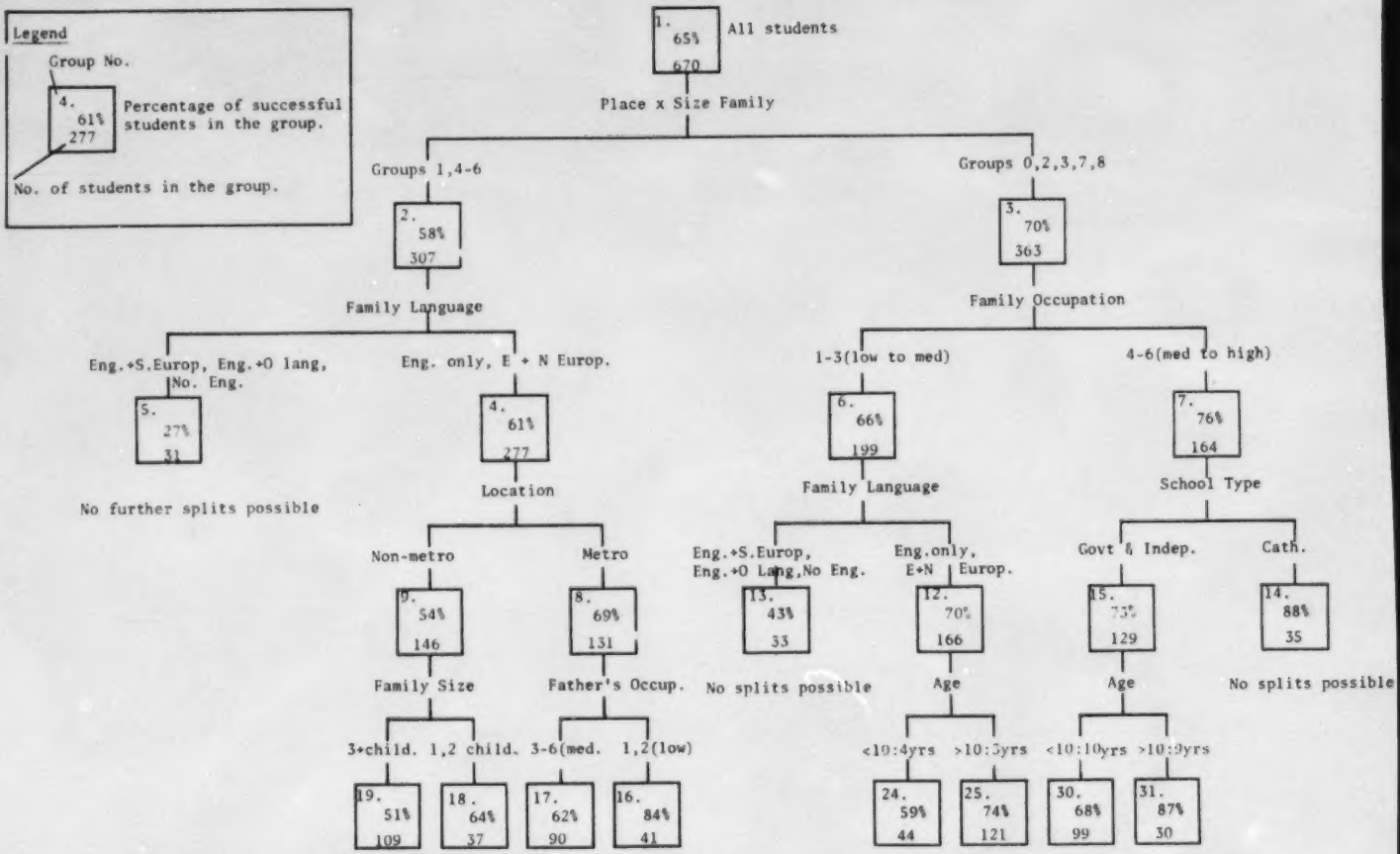





Figure 11.6 THAID Analysis: Personal and Home Background Variables as Predictors of Success on the Speaking Test Item (Making Critical Judgements) by 10-Year-Old Students

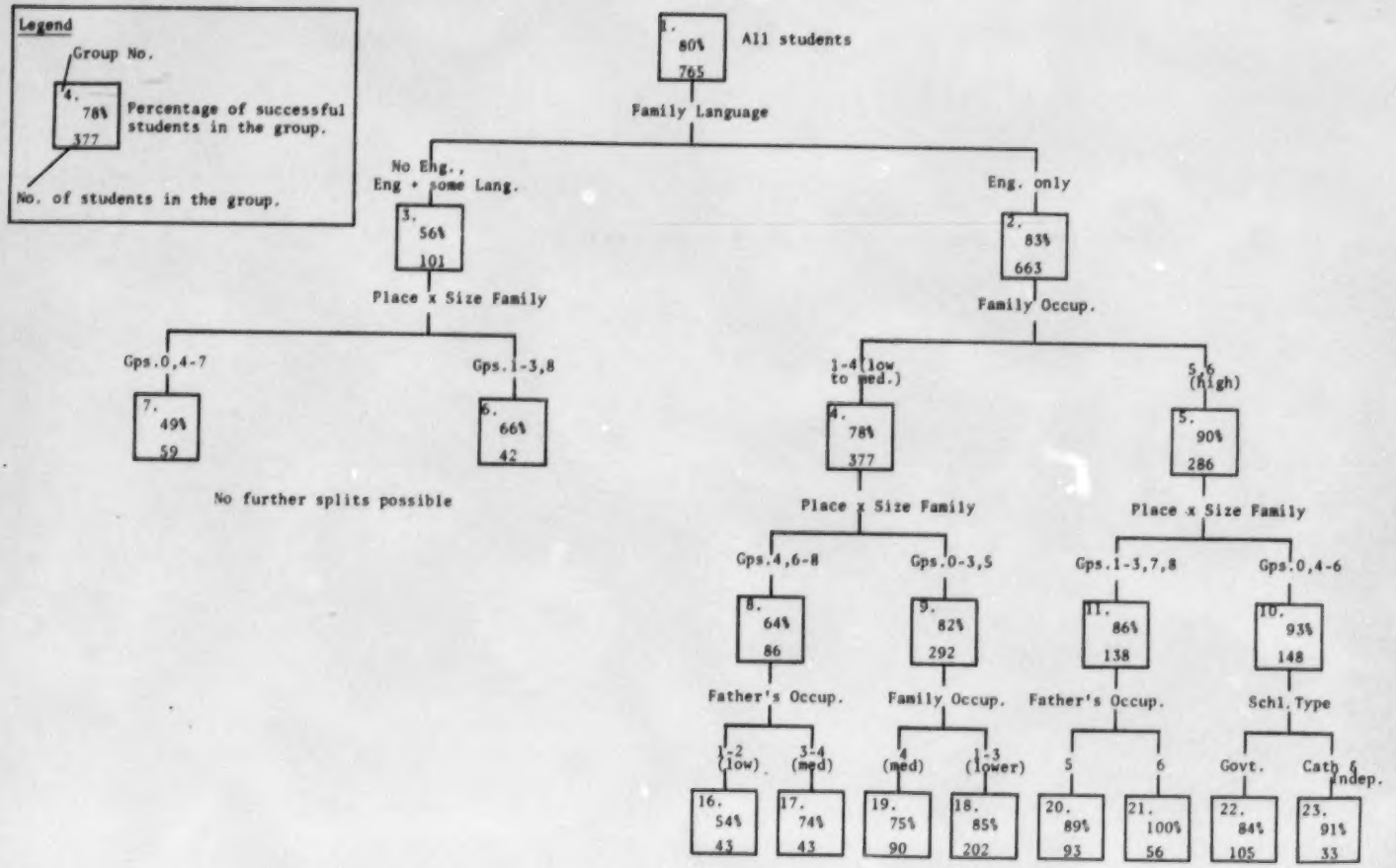





Figure 11.7 THAID Analysis: Personal and Home Background Variables as Predictors of Success on the Total Listening Test by 14-Year-Old Students

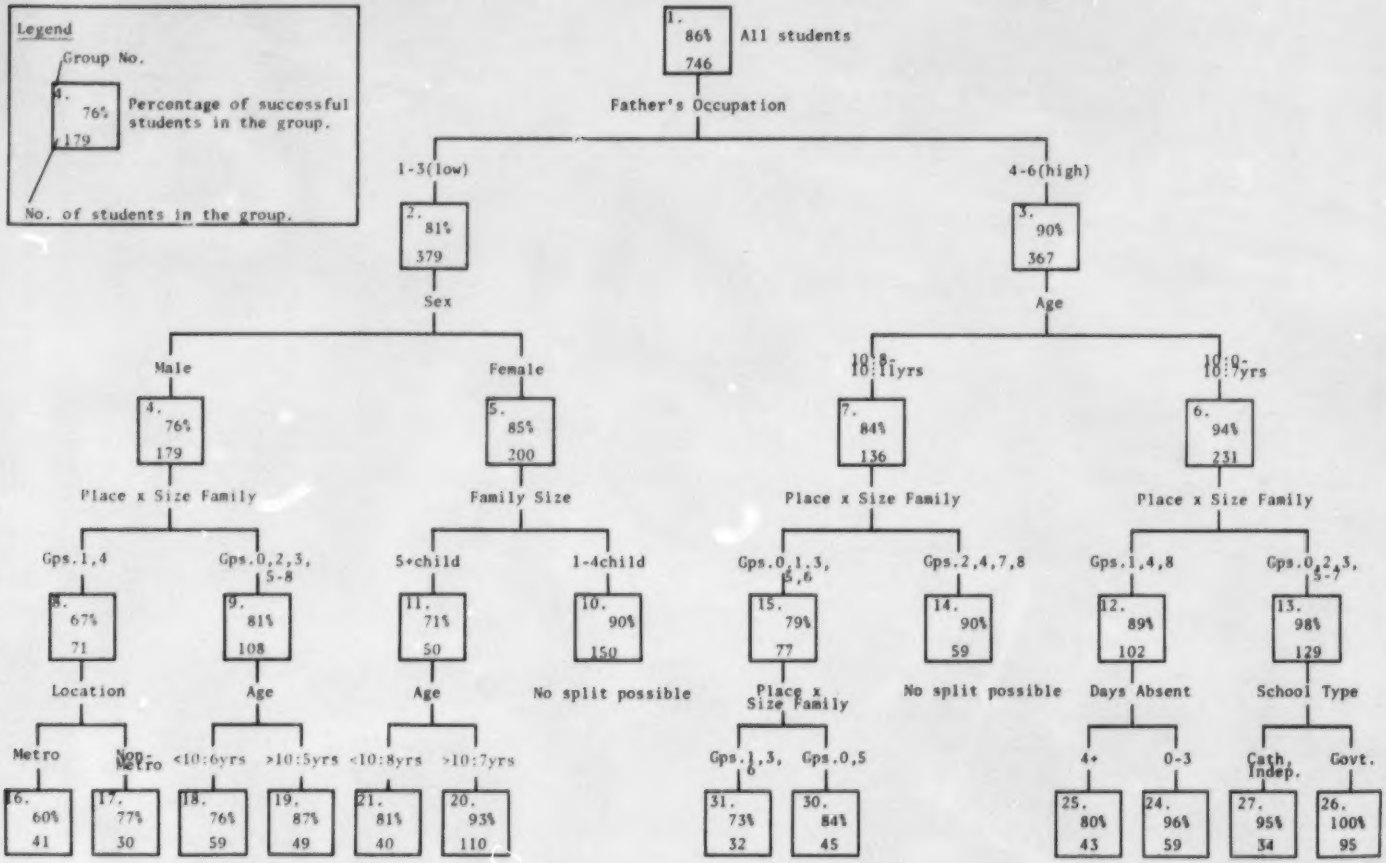





Figure 11.8 THAID Analysis: Personal and Home Background Variables as Predictors of Success on the Speaking Test Item (Making Critical Judgements) by 14-Year-Old Students

spoken in the home, and student place by size of family were the next most important variables. Almost double the proportion of students from lower occupational status families where only English or English and an 'other' language was spoken at home were successful on the total listening test than the proportion of students from homes where English plus a European language or no English was spoken. Although place by size of family was important for two different groups of students, its relationship with student performance was not consistent. Reference to the place-by-size group numbers (see Table 11.12) shown for Groups 7 and 11 indicates that an almost identical combination of place-by-size groups had respectively the higher and lower achievement for these splits. Whereas 79 per cent of students from high status families were successful, only 17 per cent of students from low status families where English plus a European language or no English was spoken were successful on the listening test. Other important variables were sex (males performing better than females for two specific groups of students), school type (students at Government schools having a lower performance than students at Catholic or Independent schools for one large group), location (for high performing groups, non-metropolitan students of both sexes had higher performances than metropolitan students), and father's occupation (one group of students with fathers in unskilled manual occupations having higher performance than students with fathers in skilled or semi-skilled manual occupations). Details of this analysis are shown in Figure 11.5.

10-Year-Old Students: Speaking as the Criterion. Figure 11.6 illustrates that place by size of family was the most important variable for the total group of 10-year-old students when making critical judgements was the speaking criterion measure. The first born in small or medium sized families, the third born in small families and later children in large families had higher performance than others. Family language was the most important variable for two large groups of students (Groups 2 and 6). In both cases students from homes where only English or English plus a North European language was spoken had higher performance than other students. The differences in proportions of successful students were quite substantial as can be seen by comparing the percentages of successful students for Groups 4 and 5 and for Groups 12 and 13. Family occupation was also important for a large number of students (Group 3) where higher occupational status was associated with higher performance. Other important variables were school type (students from high occupational status families attending

Catholic schools had a higher performance than similar students attending Government or Independent schools), age of student (two groups of older students having higher performance), location (one large group where students from metropolitan areas had a higher performance than non-metropolitan students), family size (non-metropolitan students from one or two child families having higher performance than other students), and father's occupation (metropolitan students whose fathers were in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations had markedly higher performance than similar students whose fathers were in higher status occupations).

14-Year-Old Students: Listening as the Criterion. Variables which caused the splitting of the 14-year-old student sample when the total listening test score was the criterion measure may be examined in Figure 11.7. Family language was by far the most important variable for the total group of students and 83 per cent of students from homes where English was the only language spoken were successful on the test compared with 56 per cent from homes where no English or English plus another language was spoken. Other very important variables were place by size of family and family occupation. Again place by size of family gave different results for the various sub-groups of students where it caused the split to occur and the categories shown in Table 11.12 should be consulted when examining the THAID diagram. Because of the small number of students from homes where a language other than English was spoken, no further splits were possible after place by size of family. In general students from small families (other than first born students) and late born students from families of six or more had a higher performance than other students. For family occupation, students from English-speaking professional and managerial families were more frequently successful on the listening test than similar students from lower status families. However for some of these lower family occupational status students, lower performance was found for white collar families than for skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled families (Group 9). Other important variables were father's occupation where higher status occupations were associated with higher performance (Groups 8 and 11), and school type where high family status students attending Catholic or Independent schools had higher performance than similar status students attending Government schools. It is of some interest to note that all 56 students with fathers in professional occupations from both small and large families where English was the only language spoken were successful on the total listening test. In all the analyses undertaken only one other group of students achieved this level of performance.

14-Year-Old Students: Speaking as the Criterion. Figure 11.8 illustrates the extensive range of splits created by the THAID analysis for 14-year-old students when speaking performance was considered. Father's occupation caused the first split when students with fathers in professional, managerial or white collar occupations were found to have a higher level of performance than students whose fathers were in skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual occupations. Sex and age of students were also found to be very important for speaking performance with females having a higher level of performance than male students whose fathers were engaged in a manual occupation, and with younger students having a higher performance than older students whose fathers had a high occupational status. Age was also important for two groups of students (Groups 9 and 11) in the lower occupational group where the age situation was reversed with the older students having higher performance than the younger students. Place by size of family was again important for four smaller groups and again results differed between the specific groups of students. Family size was important for one group of female students (Group 5) where students from families with up to four children had a higher performance than students from larger families. Other important variables for the speaking performance of smaller groups of students were location (non-metropolitan students having higher performance than metropolitan students), attendance (students with up to three days absence higher than students with more absences), and school type (students at Government schools having a higher performance than students at Catholic or Independent schools). The 95 students at Government schools were younger than other students, came from families of all sizes where the father had a high status occupation and all of them were able to respond adequately when asked to make a critical judgement in the speaking test.

Summary for Personal and Home Variables

The most important variable overall was place by size of family in that it accounted for more splits of the larger groups of students than any other variable. However the relationship between place by size of family with listening and speaking performance was very dependent upon the specific group of students in each case. Based on the method of categorizing this variable and the results obtained, it was not possible to discern a clear indication of the relationship of this variable with student performance in listening and speaking. Other variables of considerable importance were father's and family occupations and family languages. Professional and

managerial occupations were consistently associated with higher performance, but there was less consistency in the relationship between white collar and skilled manual occupations and semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations. For languages spoken by the family, students from homes where only English was spoken in general had a higher level of performance than other students. This was the case for both listening and speaking at the 10-year-old level and, at the 14-year-old level for listening but not for speaking. The high achieving groups were sometimes joined by either the English plus a North European language group or the English plus an 'other' language group.

Age was important for speaking performance at both age levels but not for listening. Where a relatively successful group of students was split by the age variable, the younger students were more successful than the older students. However when a relatively unsuccessful group of students was split by age, the older students had the higher level of performance. Other important variables for both listening and speaking were location and school type, and in both cases the relationship with performance depended upon the specific group of students. Family size was more important at the 14-year-old level than the 10-year-old level, but in each case students from smaller families had higher performance. Sex was important for the listening test performance of the 10-year-old students from higher status occupational groups (males had the higher performance) and for the speaking performance of the 14-year-old students from lower status occupational groups (females had the higher performance).

There were three personal and home variables which had relatively little or no importance for listening and speaking. These were attendance (responsible for one minor split) and country of birth of the student's father and mother which were not responsible for any splits.

## Student Performance by All Background Variables

School variables were analysed separately because it was considered that these factors were capable of being influenced by teachers or by educational authorities. Knowledge of the relationships that existed between student performance and variables such as use of audio-visual aids, sources of school programs and the identification of students' learning problems could conceivably lead to changes in teacher practice. Knowledge of the relationship between student performance and school size, Year level of students and teacher turnover could eventually lead to changes in larger-scale

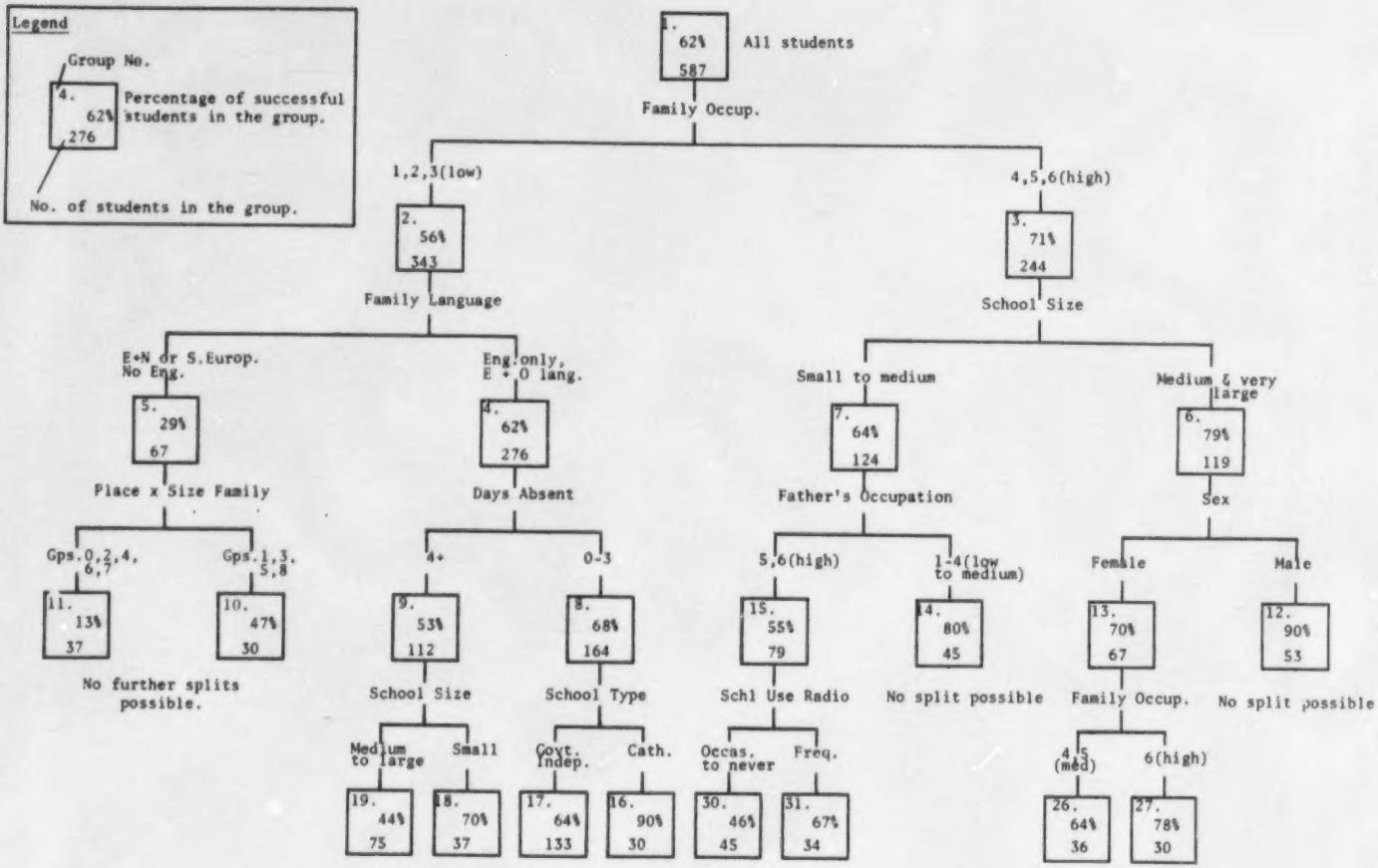





Figure 11.9 THAID Analysis: All Background Variables as Predictors of Success on the Total Listening Test by 10-Year-Old Students

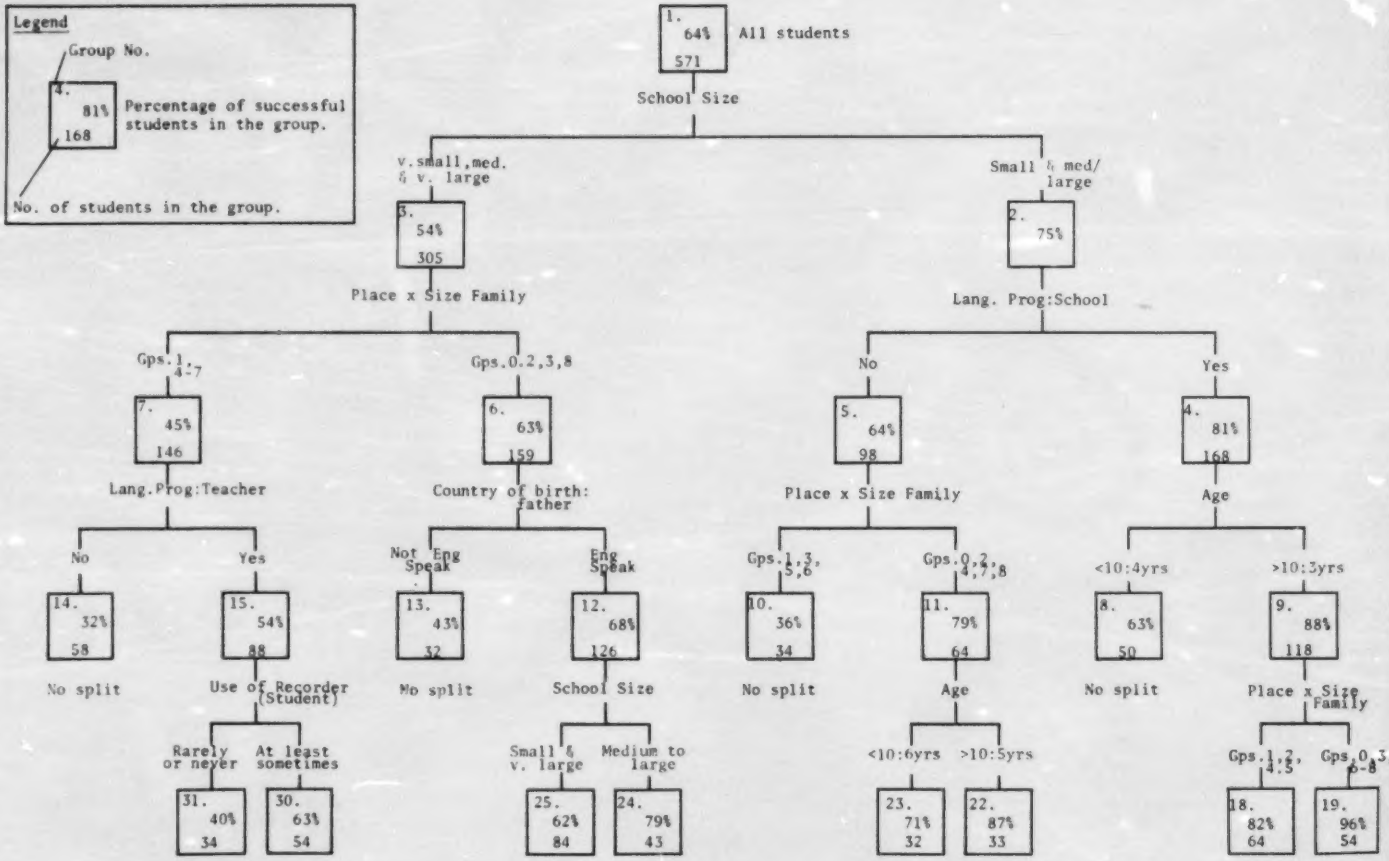





Figure 11.10 THAID Analysis: All Background Variables as Predictors of Success on the Speaking Test Item (Making Critical Judgements) by 10-Year-Old Students

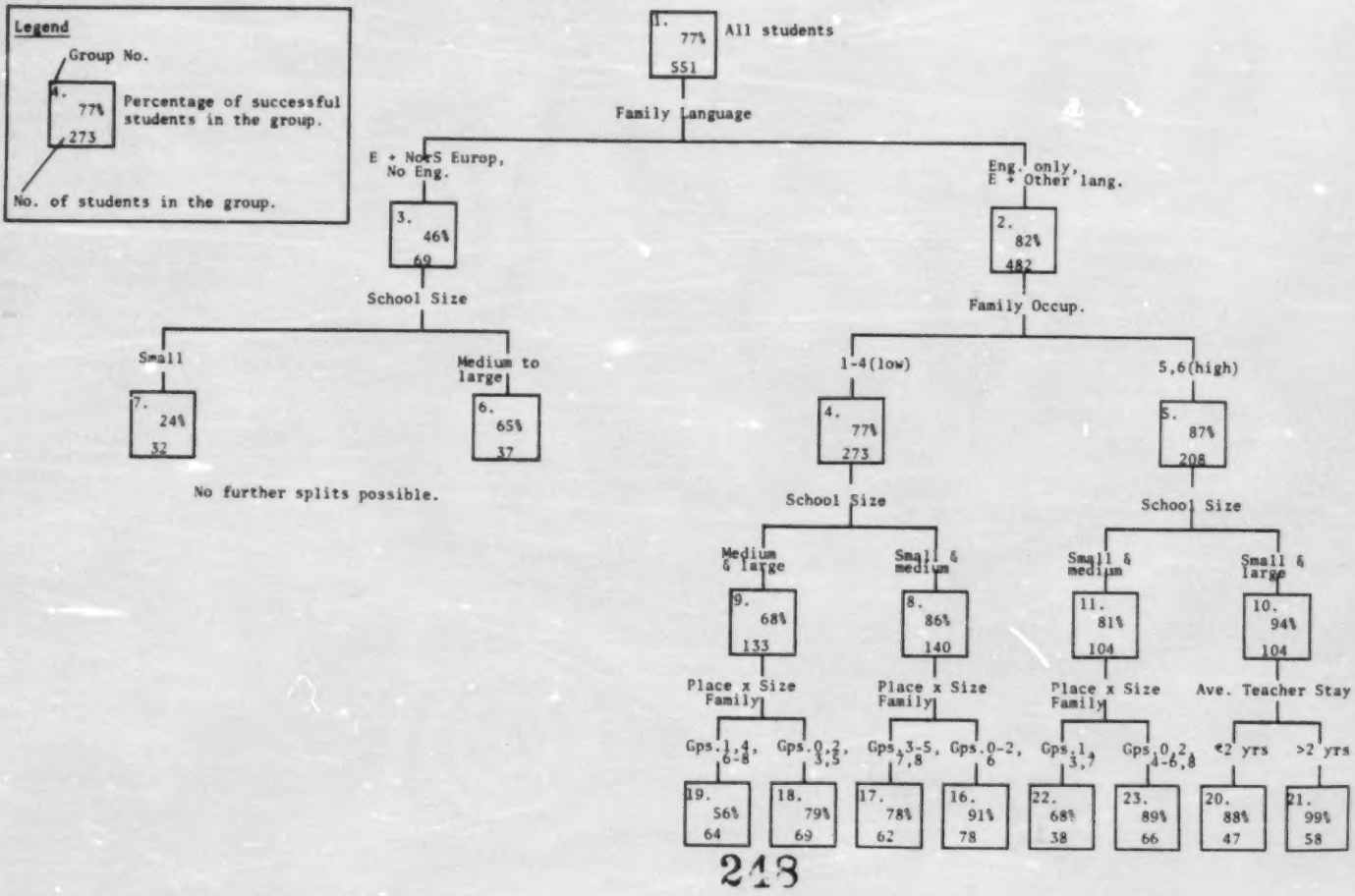
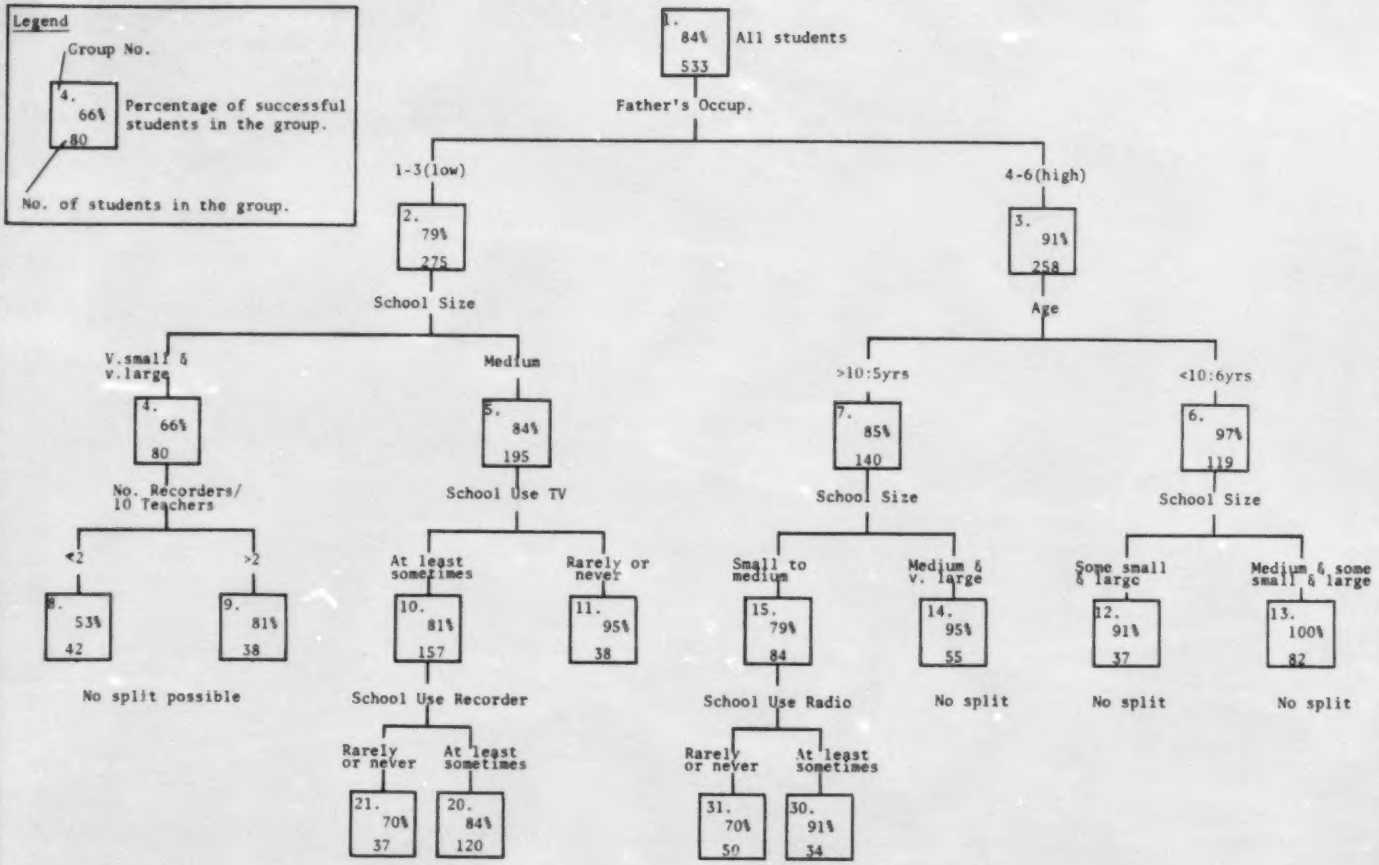





Figure 11.11 THAID Analysis: All Background Variables as Predictors of Success on the Total Listening Test by 14-Year-Old Students






igure 11.12 THAID Analysis: All Background Variables as Predictors of Succes on the Speaking Test Item (Making Critical Judgements) by 14-Year-Old Students

educational planning. It is not suggested that the results contained in this chapter warrant changes at either level, but simply form a small part of the background information available when these issues are considered.

Personal and home background variables are not subject to change by teachers or by educational authorities. They are measures of a given situation such as the language background of a student, or parental decisions such as where to live (location) and where to send their child to school (school type). However knowledge of the relationships between these variables and student performance would be most useful when courses of action are planned at both decision-making levels. Consequently personal and home variables have also been considered separately.

The relative importance of school variables and personal and home background variables is of some interest. On the one hand it is possible that the variables capable of being influenced by a teacher, though important among school variables, are relatively unimportant when all variables are considered together. If this is the case teachers need to be aware of the limitations of any attempt they make to overcome student problems. Conversely the variables likely to have a major impact on student learning should also be recognized.

The results of THAID analyses including all background variables at both age levels for listening and for speaking are shown in Figures 11.9 to 11.12. Much of what appears in those tables is a repetition of information available in Figures 11.1 to 11.8, but there are some important differences. The samples on which the analyses for all variables have been performed are smaller than the earlier analyses because of the requirement that no student included had any missing data on any of the variables included in the analysis. It is not intended to duplicate detail already covered in this chapter but simply to point out the relative importance of various school, personal and home variables and to comment on differences between these and earlier analyses.

The most important variable for student performance in terms of the number of splits it caused and the numbers of students involved in those splits was school size. However the nature of the relationship varied with the composition of the particular group being split, and no generalization applicable to both age levels and to listening and speaking was possible. Following this school variable, the three next most important variables were related to the student's home background - family occupation,

place by size of family and family language. High status family occupation was related to high levels of student performance in terms of the proportions of students succeeding on the listening test. Family occupation was not as closely associated with speaking performance as was father's occupation for which high occupational status linked with a high proportion of students succeeding on the task chosen as the speaking criterion. As already stated, place by size of family gave results that were idiosyncratic to the particular group of students being split. It was most important for the listening performance of the 14-year-old students and the speaking performance of the 10-year-old students. In the analyses involving all variables, place by size of family was not at all important for the speaking performance of the 14-year-old students and of only very minor importance for the listening performance of the 10-year-old students. This represents a marked change from the results of the THAID analyses when personal and home variables were considered separately. Family language was particularly important for the listening performance of 10 and 14-year-old students but not for speaking performance at either age level. This again represents a change from the results of earlier analyses. Students from homes where only English or English plus an 'other' language was spoken were more frequently successful than students from homes where no English or English plus a European language was spoken.

The age of students was important for speaking but not for listening in the same way as was reported for earlier analyses. There were many other variables of only minor importance overall. These were teacher time at the school; involvement of individual teachers and individual schools in the development of language programs (and these latter two were important only at the 10-year-old level for speaking); the availability and student use of recorders; the school's use of recorders, radio and television, sex; school type; school attendance; and country of birth of the student's father. Variables which were not responsible for any splits when all variables were permitted to compete were family size, location, country of birth of the student's mother, the ideal or actual importance of oracy in the curriculum, the identification of students with listening or speaking problems, teacher experience, Year level of student, and the involvement of the district or a group of teachers within a school in the development of language programs.

It is unfortunate that no substantial generalizations can be made about the relationships between two of the variables that had close

associations with student performance in listening and speaking, that is school size and place by size of family. The likelihood is that these variables will always be dependent upon many other factors in the school and home situations and that general relationships do not exist. However in any future work of this nature it would seem to be prudent to consider the nature and categorization of these two variables much more closely than has been possible in this chapter concerned with a large number of potentially-important variables for listening and speaking performance.

CHAPTER TWELVE

# THE IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF LISTENING AND SPEAKING TASKS - A SUMMARY

## The Identification of Tasks

The aims of this study were twofold, first to identify the listening and speaking tasks considered by teachers and others to be important for students, and secondly to assess student performance on those tasks. The model used to identify the important tasks for assessment involved a three-dimensional classification of tasks in terms of the listening or speaking ability required to perform the task, the context of the task and the individual's purpose in listening or speaking. The ability dimension was considered to be the key to a school's oral language program and was used as the basis of classifying tasks for possible assessment. Four categories of language were identified as a means of grouping listening and speaking abilities. These were oral vocabulary, literal meaning, implied meaning, and analytical and critical thinking.

Teacher views on the importance of oracy in the school's language program generally, and on the individual importance of large numbers of specific listening and speaking tasks were obtained by interview and by questionnaire. In general teachers considered oracy to be important in itself because of its primacy as a means of communication. However a significant minority of teachers saw oracy as important largely because of its contribution to the development of literacy. When a group of teachers from the same school were interviewed, a school view of the importance of oracy and of classroom practices and assessment did tend to emerge. The majority of teachers saw a need for some assessment of listening and speaking abilities, although smaller numbers of teachers considered that oral language assessments were either not necessary, not possible or both.

The opinions of teachers, the Advisory Committee for the project and the researchers were used to reduce the extensive lists of listening and speaking tasks gathered from the literature to more manageable proportions. Fortunately there was a large measure of agreement between these three groups and finally 22 listening and 22 speaking tasks were selected for possible assessment.

## Restrictions on Assessments Made

The time available for testing was an obvious restriction on the listening and speaking assessments made. Not all of the 22 listening and 22 speaking tasks selected could be tested in the context of tests each lasting approximately 30 minutes. Although the limited time available prevented a complete mapping of student performance, it was a realistic restriction. Because a relatively minor portion of the school day is all that is available for assessment purposes, it becomes necessary for teachers to use the available time as efficiently as possible. Thus some of the 22 listening and 22 speaking tasks were assessed jointly (for example, comprehending conversation and comprehending implied meaning) while some tasks were subsumed under others in the tests (for example, identifying intended audience was totally included in the sub-test concerned with comprehending in different situations). The relatively short time available forced the assessments for this project to parallel other classroom assessments in efficiency.

The assessments made were also restricted by the nature of the testing program devised. In the case of the listening tests which were presented by audio-cassette, all visual cues for the listeners (students) were lost. The cost and administrative and technical difficulties involved in the use of video-cassettes prevented their use but, even if video-cassette recordings had been used, there are marked differences in listening in a face-to-face situation and listening to a recording. However the range of contexts for the listening tests were expanded as much as possible by the inclusion of a didactic exposition, interviews, a playlet and factual as well as expressive statements. To remove a writing component which would have complicated any listening assessment, students were required only to tick the appropriate box or make some other mark on the page in front of them. All instructions for the test were included on the audio-cassette.

The speaking tests consisted of an individual interview of the student in most cases by a teacher at the school with the interview being recorded on an audio-cassette which was returned to the ACER for scoring. The quality of some of the recordings was such that they put a considerable strain on the person scoring the test, a difficult-enough task in itself. Consequently the time taken to score the speaking tests was much greater than had been anticipated. In many cases a scorer needed to listen to a single response a number of times before feeling able to assess it.

Naturally this problem greatly increased the expense of scoring the responses to the point where the majority of the speaking tests could be scored once only. However in addition to a considerable amount of spot-checking and re-scoring, 100 speaking tests at each age level were completely re-scored. Items for which the two scores failed to reach at least 70 per cent agreement over the 100 responses were omitted from the speaking test results presented in Chapter Eight. This loss represented a considerable restriction to the speaking assessments, although more than 20 separate assessments were made at each age level. Finally the types of speaking assessments undertaken did not include students taking part in a group or even two-way conversation. This was a major deficiency in the range of speaking assessments but could not be done at the same time or in the same way used to make the other assessments. It was considered to be preferable to omit the assessment of this important competency as it could not be well done.

## Summary of the Assessments

As already stated the listening and speaking abilities students possessed were the major focus of the assessments made in this project. Results for the criterion-referenced listening tests were presented in the form of sub-tests, each reporting performance for a specific ability. To be considered as successful on a sub-test, a student was required to have an estimated true score of 80 per cent of items correct for the sub-test. Results for the speaking tests were presented for each item in terms of adequacy of response or for global measures of fluency of response. Adequacy was a criterion-referenced measure related to the successful communication of a piece of information, a statement or an idea according to pre-determined criteria. Fluency was scored on a normal distribution according to the extent to which pace, pause and rhythm of speech was appropriate without excessive hesitation or slowness.

### Listening Assessment

The proportion of students who were successful on the appropriate sub-test was used in reporting results for each task. If the total test result were taken as an indication of overall listening performance, 62 per cent of the 10-year-old and 79 per cent of the 14-year-old students would be considered as successful. For most sub-tests the proportions of successful 10-year-old students ranged from 45 to 65 per cent and the proportions of 14-year-old students from 75 to 90 per cent. Almost all the 10-year-old

and all the 14-year-old students were successful when comprehending words and simple statements and understanding instructions. However only a quarter of the 10-year-old students were able to comprehend passages, make critical judgements and recognize emotional language to the levels required by the sub-tests. There were three listening sub-tests that were identical at the two age levels. These were the Total Anchor Items Sub-test and those concerned with comprehending literal meaning and comprehending passages. When results were compared it was found that approximately 30 per cent more 14-year-old than 10-year-old students had succeeded in reaching the criterion scores for these tests. In each case the majority of students were assessed as being able to perform the task before they reached the end of the compulsory phase of schooling.

Speaking Assessment

High proportions of students at both age levels were able to give personal details orally. This was particularly true of the 14-year-old students where at least 95 per cent were correct on each item. The performance of the 10-year-old students was more variable, but the proportion of successful students did not fall below 78 per cent for any item where the students were providing personal details.

For other speaking tasks there was a considerable range in the proportions of successful students. One of the important factors affecting the adequacy of responses seemed to be the context in which the task was placed. At both age levels the task of repeating an idea had the lowest proportion of successful students with 46 per cent of 10-year-old students and 40 per cent of 14-year-old students making an adequate response, and the task of listing facts had the highest proportion of adequate responses with 99 per cent of students successful. For most items when the context was familiar to students, at least 80 per cent were able to perform adequately the speaking task that had been set.

The two global fluency measures used were fluency-when-reading-aloud and fluency-when-giving-opinions. Fluency was related to adequacy for individual students but the two measures did seem to be tapping different aspects of student responses. Many students had poor fluency but made adequate responses and the opposite was also true. Those scoring the speaking tests were able to distinguish a greater range of fluency for the reading-aloud measure but the giving-opinion measure was more closely related to the adequacy assessments made. Fluency was also more closely related to adequacy for the 10-year-old students.

The task of reading aloud was assessed for adequacy by the number of errors made and by the literal comprehension of what was read. By either measure at least approximately 90 per cent of students were successful. It would seem that this high proportion of students is able to read aloud accurately while comprehending what they read, at least to the level of difficulty demanded in the speaking tests.

Student performances on two of the speaking tasks were assessed in greater detail. The tasks concerned were describing objects by referring to detail and telling a story, both of which were common to the tests at both age levels. Small groups of students selected as being very 'high' or very 'low' scorers on the Word Knowledge Test were used in these analyses. The high group students at both age levels produced more words and spoke more fluently than the low group students. They contracted words when necessary and used fewer non-words and pauses. Their pauses were also shorter and were used productively as evidenced by what followed a pause. The high group students were able to reduce the number of mazes they produced and the number of words in each maze, at the same time as they decreased the number of communication units but increased the number of words in each unit. The mean number of words in each communication unit was lower for low group students yet the proportion of mazes was much higher. In general, the high group students said more and did it more efficiently than the low group students.

Both the high and low groups of students found it more difficult to produce functional language as required when describing an object than the expressive language required in telling a story. It was probable that the 10-year-old students in particular were less familiar with the task of using language for description than with using language for more imaginative purposes. Primary teachers had rated functional language tasks as important but not essential, whereas secondary teachers had rated such tasks as essential.

Comparisons Between Task Performances

It was found that success on the listening task of comprehending words and simple statements did seem to be necessary for success on more complex listening tasks by 10-year-old students. However it was also found that, for speaking, the presumed pre-requisite task of repeating an idea did not seem to be necessary for the task of making critical judgements of the same idea.

When performances of individual students on apparently similar listening tasks, similar speaking tasks and similar listening and speaking tasks were considered it was found that there were no significant relationships between the tasks. The same was true of apparently dissimilar tasks. It would seem that the different contexts and the discrete nature of the abilities possessed by individual students combined to eliminate relationships that might be anticipated between student performance on listening and speaking tasks.

It had been thought that speaking test performance could be influenced by the relationship between the test administrator and the student, and by the degree of confidence displayed by the student. The administration of the speaking test by a person who was not known to a student did not adversely affect the performance of the student when compared with other students who had the test administered to them by a teacher at the school. However student confidence as perceived by the test administrator was found to be closely related to performance on various tasks. Fewer students who lacked confidence to some degree were successful when compared with students who were generally confident.

## The Performances of Specific Student Groups

Many of the identified groups of students performed differently on the various listening and speaking tasks assessed. For example when the sex of students was considered, male students frequently performed better than female students, particularly for listening at the 10-year-old level, while the reverse was true for many speaking tasks. Similarly when the metropolitan and non-metropolitan locations of students were considered, metropolitan students of both ages had the higher performance for speaking while non-metropolitan students were better at listening but only at the 10-year-old level.

There were somewhat more consistent relationships between student performance and other variables such as type of school attended and languages spoken in the home. For listening, students attending Independent schools consistently had the highest level of performance and students attending Government schools had the lowest level. However for speaking the relationship, although generally in the same direction, was much weaker and less consistent. Differences between students according to the languages spoken at home were also less for speaking than for listening but were also consistent. Those from homes where only English was spoken had the highest

level of performance generally and were frequently joined for different sub-tests either by the English plus a North European or English plus an other language group.

The most important of the school variables were whether teachers perceived a listening or a speaking problem with individual students, school size and the average length of time teachers had spent at the school. Other important school variables were school use of a tape or cassette recorder and school use of radio. School size was perhaps the most important variable overall for listening and speaking at both age levels but its relationship with performance was not consistent.

Of the personal and home variables for which data were collected the most important for listening and for speaking appeared to be place by size of family, but again the relationship with performance was inconsistent. Other particularly important variables were father's and family occupations and (as already discussed) family languages or languages spoken in the home. There were a number of other variables which were important for either listening or speaking at one but not at both age levels. These included age of student, sex, location and school type (already discussed), and family size. Other variables were less important for performance in listening or speaking at both age levels.

## Implications of the Results

The provision of information that appears in this Report is considered to be an essential stage in a fuller understanding of the place of oracy in schools. The general indication of the levels of student performance provided on the various listening and speaking tasks assessed is also important as background when the performances of specific groups or of individual students are considered. The recording of generalised information of the relationship between performance and many of the huge range of school, personal and home background factors which impinge on achievement is also helpful in drawing attention to important relationships which affect learning. However necessary, the analyses of student performance in listening and speaking and of important factors for achievement reached in this report is insufficient for detailed programs to be planned either for school curricula in oracy or for individual students' oral language development. In particular a much closer examination, based on empirical evidence, of the apparent confounding of ability and context and the importance of both for individual student performance is clearly

needed. The type of information required for such an examination could probably only be provided by detailed case studies of individual school programs or individual students. Case studies of individual students would also be helpful in unravelling some of the complex relationships found to exist in this study between background factors and student performance. For example, the combination of family size and a student's place in that family was found to be very important for performance in listening and speaking but the relationships were inconsistent suggesting that insufficient information about family structure had been collected. Spacing of children in a family as well as family size and place in family may well be important for students' oral language development. In this study teachers were simply asked whether each student received remedial help in listening or speaking. In a case study situation it would also be possible to obtain for the small numbers of students involved information on the nature of additional assistance they received before analysing their test results. Teacher perceptions of student problems in these areas could be probed to determine how they made judgements of student needs. The relationships between literacy and oracy development for individual students could also be investigated in a case study situation and for larger groups in a survey testing situation involving assessments in reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Of course not all teachers accept the notion of language development based on specific abilities which is fundamental to this study of student performance in listening and speaking. However for the many who do work specifically towards developing students' oral language abilities in a range of contexts, either explicitly or implicitly, it was intended that this project would be a source of ideas for oral language experiences and assessments. The curriculum information contained in Section A of this report, the information on teacher practices and priorities in Section B, and the levels of student performance on specific tasks reported in Section C could be used in this way by teachers. Clearly there is a vast need for advice and materials to assist teachers in planning and implementing oral language programs.

Finally it should be re-iterated that it is not claimed that the development of specific oral language abilities is the only way in which school programs in this area could proceed, but that this is one way which is currently being used in schools. Neither is it claimed that all the important listening and speaking abilities have been identified and

assessed in the course of this project. What is claimed is that the abilities identified and assessed are important for students' oral language development and that the tasks used to assess these abilities are appropriate and realistic measures of the abilities. It is respectfully suggested that teachers interested in students' oral language development should consider the classification of abilities used, the nature of the range of tasks assessed, and the results obtained by students to decide for themselves whether they should include such practices in their language programs. If this were done the inclusion of oracy in school curricula would at least receive the consideration it merits.

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The Appendix, pages 259-412, are on microfiche only, therefore it is not included with the document.